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Practical Enhancements to Willow Creek's Spiritual Continuum:
Prayer, Mentoring, Small Groups, and the Cross

A Research Portfolio
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Doctor of Ministry
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by
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ABSTRACT

This project explores in three parts the connection between mentoring, growth in personal prayer practices, and spiritual growth. The first part looks at how mentoring and personal prayer practices influenced my personal spiritual journey. The second part provides practical enhancements to an existing model of spiritual formation and discusses the place of small groups, suffering, mentoring, and personal spiritual practices in that enhanced model. Finally, in the third part I review a ministry project where I mentored seven individuals in their personal prayer lives over a seven-week period. The results show that in this context, there is a positive link between mentoring and growth in personal prayer, and consequently spiritual growth.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this portfolio first to my wife, Marijean, the love of my life, whose unwavering support has made this possible. Second, I dedicate this to my parents, Elias and Jeannette, who sacrificed so much for the sake of their children. Third, I dedicate this to my siblings, Dina, Mona, Nadia, and George, for our journey together. Fourth, for my sons and their wives, Nathan and Jessica, Sam and Kathryn, Ben and Eva, and my daughter Hannah, all of whom I love so dearly. Fifth, to their children someday, that the inheritance of Christ would continue for many more generations.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio explores the link between mentoring, growth in personal prayer, and the resulting spiritual growth. This is done by reviewing the impact of these avenues of growth in my own life, by enhancing an existing model of formation, and by performing a research study of mentoring individuals in prayer. I am a spiritual director, a counselor, and part of the preaching team at the Brown Line Vineyard in Chicago, Illinois. My personal walk with God has shown me the importance of personal spiritual practices as spiritually transformative agents. It has also shown me that prayer can be taught and that it can be learned, and that one of the best ways to do so is through personal mentoring. In this introduction, I will briefly explore some of the ways that personal prayer has a spiritually transformational effect on the individual. I will then give an overview of how I will be suggesting practical enhancements to the model of spiritual formation derived from the findings of the *Reveal* study from the Willow Creek Association, labelled the Spiritual Continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 37), and look for insights from other models spanning different traditions and different time periods to see if and how they support the Spiritual Continuum. The enhancement will focus on showing how personal prayer may change over time and the different ways dyadic relationships can support those changes, as well as the roles of small

groups and suffering in various stages of that continuum. I will then describe the research project I completed to study the impact of mentoring on prayer and consequently spiritual growth, and finally I will discuss some influential aspects of my spiritual autobiography, as well as some of the limitations of this effort.

How Personal Prayer Transforms Us

Prayer, as defined in a very general sense in the *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Howard 2008), is communication with God. This communication includes speaking, listening, and the silence in between (Howard 2008, 300). This portfolio paper is predicated on the efficacy of individual prayer on a person's spiritual growth. In addition to my own experience, as highlighted in the next chapter, and quantitative data, as highlighted in chapter three, multiple authors have attested to the power of prayer to transform us in general, as well as in more specific ways. Henry Nouwen says that faithfulness in private prayer gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to transform us (Nouwen 2013, locations 499 of 3532). Richard Foster describes Dallas Willard's view that the spiritual disciplines (of which prayer is central) are one of the three sides of the triangle of spiritual formation (the second being our continuing interactions with God, and the third, the patient endurance God develops in us) (Foster 1992, 58). In the same way that spending time with others changes us, spending time with God changes us. It not only changes us, but it renews us (Howard 2008, location 322 of 1517) and changes our relationship with God (Howard 2008, location 324 of 1517). Prayer brings renewal within us (Howard 2008, location 322 of 1517). It increases

our consciousness of God and our contact with him (Wilson 2012, location 896 of 2761; Howard 2008, location 321 of 1517).

In addition to these general ways, the more specific ways of transformation through personal prayer that I will briefly review are greater ability to love God and others, growth in discernment, greater understanding of truth, various forms of healing, and most importantly a deeper sanctification.

In prayer we learn to love God (McKnight 2006, location 223 of 2198). We learn to love him more than the gifts he gives (Foster 1992, 24). Regardless of the forms that prayer takes, its purpose is always love. It is intended to focus our attention on “seeking, establishing, or deepening intimacy” with God (McColman 2010, locations 1395-1396). Prayer also increases our experience of his love (Reese and Loane 2012, location 2516). Mother Teresa of Calcutta said that “Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of Himself” (Ogilvie 1990, 189). Receiving his love allows us then to love others in a deeper way (Foster 1992, 219).

Prayer makes discernment possible (McKenna and Libersat 1987, 25-26). Nouwen says that “the way of discernment begins with prayer” (Nouwen 2013, location 332 of 3532). Our ability to hear God is sharpened in prayer (Howard 2008, location 385 of 1517). This then leads to a better discernment of our identity, our vocation (Nouwen 2010, locations 618-620 of 2649), and our unique place in the world (Nouwen 2013, location 394 of 3532). We become more aware of the truth of what desires God has placed in us through the practice of prayerful

solitude (Barton 2010, location 1440 of 1537; Payne 2000, 77). Prayer helps us to establish our identities as separated from our parents and others (Payne 1995, 62).

Payne describes listening prayer as a process of becoming more real, substantive, and taking on more solidity (Payne 2000, 126). She quotes P. T. Forsyth: “By prayer we acquire our true selves” (Payne 2008, 29). Nouwen says that this identity we receive in prayer tells us that we are blessed and, in turn, gives us the power to bless others (Nouwen 1996, 62-63).

The process of discernment brings about growth in our ability to identify truth. God gifts us with wisdom through prayer (Manning 2000, 112). This increasing awareness of truth leads to transformation when we identify the unhelpful voices that we listen to, reject them and replace them with God’s voice (Payne 2000, 14). We begin to understand the idols in our lives and the “bent position” they put us in (Payne 1995, location 890; Barton 2010, location 1447 of 1537).

This greater awareness of God’s truth begins to correct what our own and others’ wounded hearts are saying to us, as well as what Satan is saying (Payne 1995, 60). This brings about healing in our lives. This kind of healing can also come from the Psalms, which bring about spiritual healing through the expression of truth. McKnight says that “Spiritual health begins to arrive at our door when we level with God the way the Psalms do” (McKnight 2006, location 746 of 2198). Other ways that prayer brings healing is by moving us from fear into love (Nouwen 2010, location 1444 of 2649), by delivering us from the effects of anger

(Wilson 2009, location 1244 of 2761), and by reducing the impact of worry (Nouwen 2010, locations 650-652 of 2649).

Perhaps the most important way that prayer brings healing is with healing from our sin. An essential part of prayer should be a pattern of confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness. Richard Foster quotes Martin Luther as saying that the Christian life ought to be one of regular repentance (Foster 1992, 42). This pattern of confession and forgiveness “reunites us” with God (Howard 2008, location 324 of 1517). In my experience, this pattern of repentance fits best within a practice of the Ignatian prayer of Examen.

The above is by no means a comprehensive list of the ways that prayer brings healing. Awareness of God’s movement and our response to it leads to healthy spiritual formation in unexpected ways (Nouwen 2010, locations 2164-2166 of 2649). Moreover, prayer brings about growth in trust (Foster 1992, 24). God answers our prayers in amazing ways, not just for our convenience, but to increase our ability to trust him (Ogilvie 1990, 49 and 54).

Prayer brings about deeper sanctification as evidenced through greater forgiveness, spiritual fruit, and conformity to God’s will. Richard Foster says that to pray is to change, and that prayer is a path given to us by God that results in the fruits of the Spirit (Foster 1992, 6), a sentiment echoed by Leanne Payne when she describes the results of prayer: “We then have hearts such as these, also named in the Scriptures: willing, perfect, tender, soft, pure, upright, clean, fixed, wise, merry, meek and lowly, honest and good, single, true, compassionate, circumcised, thankful, and so on” (Payne 1995, 136).

Prayer also gives us the power to forgive others (Payne 1995, 62) and address some of the more difficult aspects of following Jesus, such as dying to self. Forgiveness is one of the difficult aspects of following Jesus. It is part of denying ourselves. Henri Nouwen says that solitude is not a place of therapy but a place where we learn to die to our old self (Barton 2010, location 970 of 1537). In Nouwen's words, "Prayer is the experience of knowing that God is the source of everything we claim as our own. To pray is to say with Jesus, 'Not my will, but yours. Not my words, but yours. Not my worth, but yours. Not my glory, but yours. Not in my name, but in yours'" (Nouwen 2010, locations 624-626 of 2649). It is through prayer that we change to fit into God's will, rather than him fitting into ours (McKenna and Libersat 1987, 39; Foster 1992, 15). Prayer gives us a sense of humility (Foster 1992, 73 and 219; Harpur 2005, 80) and a teachable heart (Foster 1992, 163).

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the ways that prayer changes us, but hopefully it helps to paint a picture of its transformative power. These changes that prayer engenders in us are part of the larger transformation that occurs in the process of spiritual formation. The process of spiritual formation is not instantaneous. It occurs in stages that Christians through history have attempted to categorize into various models. It is to these models, and practical enhancements of the Spiritual Continuum, that we now turn.

Stages of Transformation

This enhanced model will be built largely on the empirically based framework developed by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson from the Willow

Creek Community Church of Barrington, Illinois. This research was conducted in several phases, resulting in more than 250,000 surveys that led to a series of conclusions published in their book *Move* (Hawkins and Parkinson, 2011). Additional contributions and support for enhancing their conclusions will be sought from an older Protestant model, as well as a historical and contemporary set of Catholic models. Reflections from my own experience will be integrated as well where appropriate.

The older Protestant model is derived from John Wesley's organization of his movement. The four different types of groups his adherents belonged to, in sequential order, can be used to infer a spiritual formation model with four distinct stages. The ancient Roman Catholic perspective I will look at is a model documented by Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500) (King 2001, location 475 of 2383). He is understood to have built his model on even earlier sources, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. He describes three stages: purgative, illuminative, and unitive (King 2001, locations 491-493 of 2383; Harpur 2005, 6). For a contemporary Catholic model, Henri Nouwen's model of formation will be used. His model describes three sets of movements: early, midlife, and mature.

The Spiritual Continuum has four spiritual stages: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 37). In addition to these sequential stages, there is a Stalled stage (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 48), and a Dissatisfied stage (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 50). There are three movements identified between the four stages listed above:

from the first stage to the second, the second to the third, and the third to the fourth. Hawkins and Parkinson analyzed a variety of Christian practices. Some were more helpful in the first movement, some in the second, and some in the third. The results show, however, that even though different practices are helpful in the different transitions, there is one set of Christian practices that is “crucial at all stages of spiritual growth,” personal spiritual practices, which include prayer, journaling, solitude, and Scripture (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 43). The authors’ recommendation is unequivocal: “personal spiritual practices are the secret to a fully engaged Christ-centered identity. If we could recommend only one spiritual growth pathway for people to follow, personal spiritual practices would be it” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 117).

Not surprisingly, the findings show that the ways people pray change as they mature through these stages. For example, one of the top five change catalysts from Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ is prayer for guidance on a frequent basis, at least several times per week (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 131). From Growing in Christ to Close to Christ, prayer for guidance becomes a daily activity. It is at this third stage, Close to Christ, that almost half the people practice regular confession of sins (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 70). Finally, in the movement from Close to Christ to Christ-Centered, there is a significant increase in the practice of setting aside time to listen to God, as well as a continuing strong correlation with the practice of confession of sins (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 160).

Knowing that personal spiritual practices, which include personal prayer move us along these models of formation and that the prayer practices themselves change, leads to a few important questions. Which prayer practices are most helpful at which stage? How are these best practices best taught? Short of giving them the survey from *Reveal*, how do we know what stage someone is at in order to suggest the ideal set of practices for that stage? Some of these authors and others do provide answers to some of these questions, and their input has been part of my own formation and will therefore inform my enhancement of the Spiritual Continuum.

The most formational aspects of my journey with God has been his work in me through suffering, small group communities, dyadic relationships, and personal prayer practices. For each stage, these aspects will be explored to see in what form they can most likely be effective. One of the possible dyadic relationships, mentoring, is of primary interest in this study. God has used personal mentors significantly in my personal prayer life. One mentor in particular encouraged me to prioritize investing in personal prayer as a way of transformation. This person's encouragement is well founded (McKnight 2006, location 212). Mentoring provides more flexibility in dealing with the various needs that individuals have in developing their prayer lives than does addressing a large congregation through sermons, where people in various stages of growth are being addressed all at once. It is even more flexible than stage-specific small groups that need to take into account all the members' needs, but where the

individual needs based on differences in personality and history can be overlooked.

A Project to Study the Effect of Mentoring on Personal Prayer and the Resulting Impact on Spiritual Growth

In the field research project described in this study, the participants were drawn from a Vineyard church plant where the predominant demographic was made up of young adults. The participants came from the population of lay leaders in the church. I interviewed them before and after the seven-week study. I also asked them to fill out an online journal entry reflecting on their prayer experience each week. During that seven-week period, I mentored each of them individually through a weekly phone call. The participants were observed to be most likely in stages two or three of the Spiritual Continuum.

The themes gathered from the interviews, journals, and my own notes of the mentoring session led to a set of findings about the common struggles that these individuals had in prayer and the input that was helpful to them from me as their mentor in the study. These findings then came together in a prayer growth model (not to be confused with the spiritual formation models) that is helpful in understanding the needs of individuals in those stages.

The prayer growth model focuses on three types of obstacles that individuals in these stages commonly face. These obstacles cause them to stagnate and stop growing. This often leads to discouragement and less personal prayer. The obstacles are: first, not knowing how to deal with distraction; second, being motivated by a sense of obligation, and feeling that prayer is a task that must be

accomplished; and third, the sense of guilt and shame that people feel around failures in prayer, which causes them to want to pray even less.

The transition that participants need to overcome for the first type of obstacle is from distraction to focus. The second type requires a transition away from task and obligation to invitation and relationship. The third is from guilt and shame to grace and freedom. These will be discussed in detail in the Interpretations section of chapter four.

The findings suggest that an effective way to help people make these transitions is through a mentoring program that includes instruction, a sense of community, and suggestions for reading Scripture and other material on Christian spirituality. This prayer growth model will be developed, described, and its implications noted in the final sections of chapter four.

Limitations of This Portfolio

There are a few limitations to note in this effort. First, a limitation to this work of significant importance is the role of suffering and adversity in spiritual formation. In my own life, walking with God through difficult times has very possibly been more formational than anything else. Suffering, however, is not something that we can control. God chooses the seasons and the ways to do his “pruning” (John 15:2). It is not something that we can predict. This makes it difficult to include in a spiritual formation model. This is not to say that it has not been tried, as in the example of John of the Cross. The role of suffering in a spiritual formation model can be included from the point of view of recognition that it is part of the process, and to learn in advance at least the basic principles of

how to walk with God through it. The work in enhancing the model will focus on this type of learning, otherwise anticipating how suffering will affect each person would be largely a matter of random chance. Only the most rudimentary outlines of when to expect a certain lesson about suffering can be anticipated, and this is a limitation to that aspect of this work that needs to be acknowledged.

Second is the problem of desirability bias in the field research project, meaning that participants may exaggerate positive reports and minimize negative ones out of a desire to please the researcher. Another limitation of this study that may impact its reproducibility in other contexts is the specific educational background and training that I brought to the study. The context of a young church plant with a specific demographic in a given denomination also needs to be kept in mind. This context may have similarities and differences to other ministry environments that would likely impact the ability to reproduce the effectiveness seen in this effort. In the end, this does not take away from the importance and relevance of the findings from this study. Given the importance of prayer for spiritual transformation, as described by the multiple authors referenced above as well as the findings from Willow Creek's research, the results of this study hold potential for effective ministry programs in similar contexts.

This portfolio is of course also limited by my own lenses and blind spots. My initial training at the undergraduate level and my first master's degree were in biomedical engineering. I had participated in empirical scientific research that created a built-in personal bias toward empiricism in my world-view. I have

sought to balance this bias with input from the various Christian traditions that have been part of my life.

Bridge Work

The influences in my spiritual journey have been Eastern and Western Catholic, evangelical, and charismatic Protestant. This is not to say that I have found a way to be fully in all traditions at the same time. It has rather been a journey that has felt much like bridge-building. Bridge work often requires one-way traffic at a time, and my journey has felt very much like that. There were seasons when it seemed God was training me in some aspect of ministry in one tradition and then asking me to share it in the other tradition at a later season. I have brought youth ministry concepts and practices from the evangelical world to the Eastern Catholic one in one season, and small group leadership skills and the Alpha course in other seasons. In the other direction, I brought my passion for spiritual direction that I had learned from the Catholic world, prayer practices that I learned from my mentors, and a theology that speaks to the redemptive value of suffering.

This exposure to more than one tradition has also been a heavy burden. It was so painful to see how hard it was for my Melkite Catholic father when I chose not to be a significant part of his church community for many years. I loved him so dearly and respected his faith so much. It was this love for him, and my knowledge of his deep love for me, that was a significant motivator for me to find common ground between the two traditions, Eastern Catholic and evangelical charismatic. This effort opened the doors to the various seasons of bridge-

building. It broke my heart that I was a reason for my father's pain, yet it seems God redeemed it by opening doors for fruitful ministry as a result. I am especially grateful for the way God redeemed this toward the end of my father's life by having me get invited to preach at the local Melkite church for five years. I think it meant so much to him.

Another dimension to this burden was that belonging is a basic human need, especially in younger years, and there were seasons when I did not have that longing fulfilled because I was not seen as fully part of one community or the other. This is not a case of picking and choosing what I liked in each tradition and rejecting the rest. If that were true, the advantages of picking and choosing would not be worth the cost of not feeling fully part of one or the other. It was rather a case of being driven by love for my dad to find common ground, latching on to what was spiritual food wherever I found it, and sharing it wherever appropriate. It is my hope that what I have found life-giving in each tradition is reflected in this work.

Ignatius of Loyola felt that “processing one’s experiences in prayer becomes a window into the person’s relationship with God. He strongly advised spiritual directors to make the prayer life of the directee a focal point for discussion” (Dirks 2013, location 2377 of 3406). Ignatius’ perspective that experiences of prayer give a window into our relationship with God is very much supported by the results of this research, which show the positive impact of personal prayer on the spiritual lives of the participants. His advice to spiritual

directors to focus on the prayer lives of the participants is also corroborated by the benefits of mentoring in prayer that are documented in this study.

CHAPTER 2:

WRESTLING WITH GOD:

A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

We all have a journey with God that shapes and forms our perspectives. Mine is no exception, and as I explore my walk with him, and how my wrestling with him has formed me, it will help to shed light on what my perspective on spiritual formation has become.

Beginnings

My family of origin is a mix of Christian traditions. My father's family is from an Eastern Rite Catholic tradition, the Melkites. This is a part of the Antiochian Orthodox church that reconciled with Rome in the 1720s. The Melkites were so called because of their loyalty to the "King" or "Malek," in this case the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople. The main spiritual influence in my mother's life came from a Presbyterian mission in Cairo, The American College for Girls. She went to school and later taught there. That is where she met my father, who was working there at the time.

My parents married in Cairo in 1953. I was their third child born there. Nine months or so after I was born, we moved to Lebanon. In Beirut I grew up going to an evangelical Sunday school, then walking over to Sunday Mass at the

Melkite church. These two traditions, one highly traditional and liturgical, the other much less so, would later come to influence my spiritual life in different seasons. From the Melkite tradition I learned about the catechism of the Catholic church and various formal prayers. From the evangelical side, I learned many Bible stories and how to pray conversationally. My father taught me how to chant various prayers and psalms according to the Byzantine tradition, whereas my mother told me Bible stories from a children's Bible every night. I learned two styles of prayer, formal and ritual as well as conversational. I was not particularly prayerful as a child, and I would never have guessed that I would become passionate about prayer later in my life.

As a child I used to escape into reading. I read almost exclusively children's action-adventure stories, yet reading nonetheless began to expand my horizons. I read to the point where I was getting through a book a day. The Lebanese Civil war began when I was 11, and that gave me opportunity to read even more at first, but not long after it began there was no electricity and that put a big dent in my reading time. We played a lot of soccer in the parking lot behind our apartment building with the neighborhood kids because our world shrank to a three-block radius. The war brought many moves and dislocation, making the pre-adolescent years some of the more difficult ones in my life. We moved many times in a three-year period. We went to stay with my mother's relatives in Egypt to escape the fighting, but then peace came, and we went back to Beirut, only to have the fighting start again. One day my father went to pick up my sisters from school because he heard shelling in the school's direction, and on the way a piece

of shrapnel went through his thigh. He determined to move us again, and so we went to Egypt again. The second time we were gone, our home in Beirut was looted. When we came back there was only heavy furniture left; everything else was gone. By this time my uncle, an American citizen, was sponsoring us to come to the United States. As a young man, my father had always wanted to come to America, and his desire was being fulfilled, albeit under difficult circumstances.

We immigrated to the United States on December 24, 1977. I had just turned fourteen. In the US, my parents connected with a local Presbyterian church, and I joined their youth group. Even though the church was very large, one of the pastors was especially welcoming to us. He invited me to go with the youth group to Disney World. I also went with them to New Mexico and Colorado, and skiing in Wisconsin. There was much to enjoy in the US, and I was having many great experiences. I also got a part-time job as a stock boy in a pharmacy, and later another job making nametags for a hospital. It was good to be able to make money after three years of not having very much because of the war.

I especially loved the public library. I could listen to more records than I could afford to buy and get so many books that I could not read them all. An unexpected thing developed, however. In my readings of history and New Age materials that I gravitated toward, I began to come across what seemed to be pre-Christian practices that had made their way into Christianity. The first seeds of doubt about my faith were born. I was not conscious of trying to find enlightenment or a special kind of wisdom, I was simply curious and fascinated.

The possibilities of reincarnation, extra sensory perception, and the supernatural began to appeal to me more and more.

I also had an interest in science, and Carl Sagan quickly became a hero figure for me. One time I was watching a television documentary where he was being interviewed, and I heard him talk about his atheism. He said something like, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there really were a God and angels watching over us?” That was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back for my faith. I remember staying up that night tossing and turning, coming to grips with the reality that I no longer believed in the faith of my parents. I believed in God still, but not much else.

This went on until my sophomore year at Northwestern University. I had taken a Philosophy of Religion class that helped me to establish a more fully thought-out system of belief. I did know there was a creator God. I did not believe that he interacted with us. I did not believe that he answered prayer. I believed that he created the universe like a clockmaker makes a clock, wound it up, and let it unfold. This did not leave much room for God’s interaction with humans, nor for God’s answering prayer. I also did not think too much about Jesus. I was effectively a Deist.

If I had had more sophistication at the time, I might have seen some of the limitations of this philosophical approach. I did not, for example, see the fatalistic view of the universe that this kind of worldview entailed, where everything was pre-ordained according to the initial plans of the clockmaker. I did not think it was possible for God to create a world with room in it for individual choice.

Coming Back to Faith

I have mentioned previously that my mother had had strong evangelical influences in her life, this even included advanced lay ministry training. She kept trying to get me to attend evangelical college student activities. I was not interested.

During Christmas of 1981, a friend of mine invited me to join him at a Christmas conference for a large college ministry to students. I gently refused, citing the cost as my reason. My mother overheard this, however, and offered to pay my way. The conference was at a nice hotel, a Hyatt Regency. Well, I was not going to pass up four days at a Hyatt fully paid, so I went.

At the conference I loved the atmosphere. I heard the gospel explained in a different way, and I liked that there were thoughtful discussions around faith where questions were welcome. I was especially struck by one of the speakers. He related an unbelievable answer to prayer. I was thunderstruck. I realized I had been wrong, and this Jesus thing was for real. At the end of his talk, he asked who wanted to commit once again to following Jesus, and I found myself standing up with conviction that this was what I wanted for the rest of my life.

This event would be a turning point for me, with life-long consequences. Jesus had my heart now. It felt like he edged me out of the driver's seat, stepped on the gas pedal—more like floored it—and I was hanging on for the ride. It was about to become the most unexpected of journeys.

Undergraduate Years

At the conference I also met my first love, a student from the University of Wisconsin. I had never fallen in love before. I had never felt this way. Love songs had a new meaning for me. As with most infatuations, we barely knew each other, and were in love with the ideal we had created in our minds of who the other person was. It lasted only until Valentine's Day a couple of months later. The breakup was devastating to me. One thing nonetheless that I am ever grateful for about this relationship, and the great blessing that it was to me, is that my friend was a woman of prayer and that she prayed for me. I was new at following Jesus as an adult, and as a new believer I needed the prayer, because my first year of following Jesus was filled with much struggle and many questions.

During this period, there were a few sources of wisdom that answered some of these questions. One was the small group Bible study I joined, another was meeting regularly with a college ministry staff member, a third was a mentoring friendship with a more senior student, and finally, some of the student ministry training events on how to read the Bible and other basics of the Christian life were helpful.

My first spiritual struggle was to see God as more than a great supernatural benefactor in the sky who was going to simply help me do life better. In fact, for the first eighteen months or so, almost everything I prayed for was answered with a resounding silence. My first attempts at prayer were met with complete failure. During those early times, it would never have occurred to me that personal prayer would become a driving passion in my life.

The transformation has been slow, and not always steady. In the early days I was not at all sure that God was out there and listening. At first it was not at all uncommon for me to pray something like, “Is there anyone out there? Am I talking to the ceiling?” I am not sure how it changed. But what I do remember is that once during that early time, as I was driving our family’s station wagon, I began to sing, making up verses singing to God how I felt. That seemed to work—I felt that I was having a conversation with someone. It felt like there was someone out there listening to the cry of my heart.

Prayer began to click for me. I started to take time out to pray. I would park by Lake Michigan and pray, or take time out in my room. At that point my spiritual life still felt very much like a boat adrift at sea. It was floating and not taking on water, but it went up and down with the waves of life.

The next catalyst came about four or five months after the Christmas conference. I had joined another Christian student group on campus called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (InterVarsity). This ministry operates on thousands of campuses, with an emphasis on helping students become established and grow in their Christian faith. It also focuses significantly on developing student leadership in each campus chapter. I was particularly blessed in the chapter I was part of at Northwestern University. The InterVarsity chapter at Northwestern at the time was particularly vibrant. Sometimes I wonder if God wanted me at Northwestern to experience a unique moment in that chapter’s modern history. Its impact on me has been indelible. The young men and women there shared a powerful zeal, a desire to love God that was passionate and real.

The passion for Jesus was contagious. I picked up the fever. I joined a small group, attended the large group meetings, and was receptive to input when it was offered.

One of the student leaders challenged me to read Scripture, telling me that I was eating an “unbalanced spiritual diet.” He said that by only praying and not reading Scripture, I was heading straight for dessert and not eating the meat, potatoes, and vegetables. He insisted I should read Psalm 119. *Insisted* is a mild word. He nagged me so much about reading that psalm that I eventually did. As I read it I realized that he had a point. You couldn’t read that psalm without being convinced of the importance of Scripture. The author of that psalm, King David, keeps talking about how much he loves the word of God, how important God’s statutes are, and on and on like that for one hundred and seventy-six verses.

I still remember the first time I took time out to read the Bible and pray. I lived at my parents’ home, and so I did it in my room, before beginning to study. What a difference that made. I could feel a sense of connecting with God and a sense of peace came over me. I was hooked—for a while.

On days I had a Bible study or other Christian activity, I didn’t take time to sit down to read the Bible and pray, but on other days I did. This didn’t include weekends, and so realistically I was only doing it three days a week, yet even that began to make a difference. I could see that my spiritual life was no longer on a roller coaster based on feelings and circumstances. It began to settle down, and I could feel myself gaining strength and stability. Soon the three days went to seven days.

The next major milestone in prayer came for me during my junior year at Northwestern. The “reserve” room at the Northwestern Library was where most InterVarsity Christian Fellowship students liked to study. I ran into my small group leader there. As we talked about some consequential topic (lost in my memory somewhere), he asked me if I had prayed about it. I responded that I did not think that God really answered my prayers. He asked me why and I replied with a litany of my unanswered prayers. He was not shy about telling me that these prayers were all selfish, but when we pray for things that are in God’s will for us, he answers “every one of them.” That gave me pause. I suspected he was right. I began to pray differently, trying to keep a broader perspective of what might be my will versus God’s will.

At roughly the same time, I went on a retreat with InterVarsity. There was a table where books were being sold. I prayed and asked God if there was a book he wanted me to read. One did catch my eye, a book for young believers by Dr. John White (White 1976). I looked at the price tag, but it said something like \$6.95, and I thought that was too much at the time. A few months later, my sister asked me to go with her to the public library’s annual book sale. She had bought a set of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and needed help carrying it. I strolled around the book sale for a minute, intrigued by the religious book section. I found the same book I had seen on the retreat, on sale for twenty cents. As I was looking at it, the librarian announced, “last half hour of the sale, all books are 50 percent off,” so I bought it for a dime.

That book became a powerful comfort to me. Two romantic breakups had given me a good dose of heartache. I took refuge in the main library where I did most of my studying. I would start by reading a bit in that book, doing the suggested Bible study at the end of each chapter, and praying. This was a great comfort in a time of feeling very rejected and sad. The sadness lifted the following summer, and I came to a place of sunshine and joy with God. This lasted for a while, and my prayer times were full of praise.

A related struggle at the time was learning to put my relationship with God on an unconditional basis. It seemed like God wanted to teach me early on to follow him regardless of how I felt, and whether he answered my prayers or not. It was particularly difficult for me to accept how much ambiguity there was in understanding God's hand in my daily life. I was very unclear as to whether a positive circumstance was an answer to prayer or not. I was particularly annoyed when I thought God was supporting me in something—a good grade in a class, for example—only to see it deteriorate a month later. God was teaching me that regardless of what I felt or understood, he was still God, and I would still follow him. This may seem a clear concept for someone more mature, but I was not exactly mature at that time. This lesson would be one I unfortunately had to learn a few more times in life, hopefully in a deeper way each time.

As much as my own prayer early on was not working to build my faith by resulting in obvious answers, something else was building my faith in surprising ways. I was learning that when I gave up something for Jesus, he turned around and gave me something far better (Mark 10:29; Luke 18:29). One story that

illustrates this during that period occurred during that same junior year at Northwestern. I had switched majors from science to engineering the year before, and some of the classes were hard and unfamiliar. Fluid Mechanics was one very difficult class.

Our first midterm was coming up on a Tuesday. The weekend before my InterVarsity Christian Fellowship small group was going on a retreat. The small group leader really wanted me to go. I had missed a lot of meetings in order to study. With a gentle tone he had put it on the line: “Are you with us or not?” I will forever be grateful for that gentle yet firmly loving confrontation from him. I decided to go, even though I would have normally wanted to stay back and study for the midterm.

The minute I got the graded midterm back, my jaw hit the floor. I had scored something abysmal like 27 out of 100. As my mind was reeling with thoughts of *I blew it*, the professor said: “Everyone did so badly on this test that I am going to give a make-up.” I studied hard, of course, but this time I got a 93 out of 100. It was my first A on an engineering test. I saw this as God’s provision for me.

I remember this so vividly because it was so early on for me with God. It seemed to be a lesson he wanted me to learn with some emphasis: to not be afraid to put him first. When I put him first, things I might have wanted to prioritize would have to take a back seat to the things he wanted to prioritize. In this case, my priority was good grades. I took a risk and gave up some of that for the sake of the retreat he seemed to want for me, and he turned around and rewarded me.

“Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given unto you” was a verse that was quickly becoming the theme of this period of my life.

Before I ever encountered an answered prayer or had any other experiences that showed me more of God’s hand, this type of experience of God’s provision kept repeating itself. When I still was figuring out the basics of walking with God and not at all sure about how a life of faith worked, this one pattern of experiences, of giving up something for Jesus and then being rewarded by him with an even better outcome, kept me believing that God is real and that what Jesus said in the Gospels is very true.

That period transitioned into a season of doing more and more ministry. In the winter of my junior year, I was involved in an animated spiritual discussion with a group of students who were hanging out at the Student Union. I felt that it had not gone well, and that my points were not well received, but afterward a young woman who in the discussion had been attacking the Bible, thanked me. I did not understand why she did.

In the following spring, InterVarsity invited a Christian apologist to campus. My small group leader wanted all of us to participate in the event. I felt it was artificial and did not want to participate; however, I agreed to at least stand in the crowd. That young woman from the Bible debate saw me there and came up to me. She told me that she had since come to Christ and begun growing in her faith. I was astounded and extremely excited. The reluctant evangelist in me was somehow lit on fire. I used the rest of that time to connect with others who

listened to the apologist, and followed up with them later. That began a journey of wanting to bring Christ to others that is with me to this day.

This new passion caught the attention of others in InterVarsity, and I was asked to lead a small group my senior year. I went to their small group leaders' training program at a camp called Cedar Campus in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where I experienced a new joy of community in the small group I was a part of. I came back from that camp excited to lead, but worried about how I was going to do that given my schedule. It did not seem that it would be possible. I prayed for God to make a way, and he did, giving me a schedule that was far less demanding than what I was expecting. Leading my first small group was a blessing to me in learning how to lead pastorally, and I hope that God used it in the lives of others. One positive thing I remember was the chance to encourage a younger leader who was hesitant in her gifting and ability, and she went on to lead a group the following year.

Graduate School

During my senior year of college, my father encouraged me to continue my education and get my master's degree in engineering. I thought about applying to Northwestern but did not know if they would give me the kind of financial aid they had provided for my undergraduate years. One day as I was working at a computer in my professor's lab, he approached me and asked if I was interested in going on to graduate school. I said yes, but likely not at Northwestern. He encouraged me to apply anyway, which I did. God's provision amazed me. I not only was accepted, but also received a full tuition scholarship as

well as a monthly stipend. God's hand seemed clear in this, as I had not expected this level of provision. I went on to graduate school at Northwestern, an experience that would deepen my scientific world-view.

In the summer of 1984, between my undergraduate and graduate years, I attended InterVarsity's month-long student leadership training camp at Cedar Campus. Although InterVarsity at Northwestern had a strong Catholic group of believers and felt very ecumenical, there were very few Catholics at the camp. I struggled to connect the Catholic side of my identity with the evangelical one.

The former had begun to come to life again a year earlier. The Eastern Rite Catholic church I had grown up in had a diocese of thirty plus churches in the United States at the time. The Melkite Diocese is spread around the country with roughly one church in each of the large cities. Some of the priests in leadership, as well as the Bishop, were very encouraging of my spiritual renewal. They provided some mentoring, although much of it had to be long distance because the diocese was so spread out. These priests connected me with a local Jesuit spiritual director, Fr. David Hassel, who would help me in so many ways for a long period to come. My mentors were interested in what I was learning with InterVarsity and opened doors for me to bring my knowledge into the diocese. I was asked to speak at the General Assembly of the annual convention. They also flew me to their seminary, which at the time was located in Methuen near Boston, for a week to work with other priests and a select group of young adult leaders from the diocese. For a week we worked on developing retreat programs. At the end of the time, the priest in charge of youth ministries for the diocese asked me to pray

about chairing a newly created board for retreat development. On the flight back to Chicago, as I prayed about it, Jesus' words from the gospel of John spoke to me: "If you love me, feed my sheep" (John 21:17). I accepted the role and led the development of retreats, as well as facilitated retreats, for the next few years.

By some measures, this ministry had excellent fruit; by other measures it was an abysmal failure. I was deeply discouraged by a pattern that I saw in these retreats. I would work hard with a local church to plan and give a retreat. At the retreat, I would have one or two or three people whose hearts would be encouraged to commit to a deeper life with Christ. After I left, however, it seemed that their enthusiasm would invariably grow cold. I was still ignorant of the need for discipleship after an initial experience of renewal. On the other hand, my mentors were very encouraging. They felt that the number of attendees was high, and the feedback was very positive. The main success I was told was that the young people saw church differently as a result of this ministry. They now saw that there was more to church experience than a social expression of their ethnic heritage; they had begun to see a Christian experience they could relate to. We even discussed seriously whether I would become a priest, it was not something I could consider seriously yet however because I was not yet married.

In the Eastern Rite Catholic churches, a priest can be married as long as he is married before ordination. I considered the possibility of priesthood, and I felt a possible calling. However, I felt no calling to a celibate life whatsoever. Ordination and seminary would have to wait until I got married. I was very lucky

at the time to have two priests as mentors. God used both to help me through the many questions of this transition period.

Even though my ministry seemed very successful on the surface, I knew that I was burning out, and that I needed rejuvenation. One of my mentors suggested I try just taking some more intentional time to tell Jesus how I felt about things in a more vulnerable way than I had expressed to date. I felt I should only do it for as long as I wanted, not more and not less. I did exactly that. It was like a cool drink after days without water. Telling Jesus about how I felt drew me closer and closer to him. It felt like he was becoming a very close friend. I had not been used to sharing my feelings, and sharing them with him in vulnerability and humility drew me into a new intimacy with him.

I also learned to do that with friends. I had always wondered why sharing the problems and difficulties of my life with others did not bring me closer to them. I came to learn, through the help of my mentor, that it's not sharing problems that brings friends together, but rather sharing feelings. That in turn means being vulnerable and having humility to let others, a few others, in to see us as we truly are.

I have often wondered if that's not what Jesus was describing to his disciples with the whole concept of washing each other's feet, and letting ours be washed by Jesus. Except that Jesus naturally comes to us through our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I came to understand that taking that step of vulnerability, that step of being willing to share my feelings in humility, meant that there would be times I

would be disappointed. Whenever we take a step of vulnerability, we risk that the other person will not be willing to go there with us. They may not be accepting of us, and that could hurt. They may also not be willing to respond in kind. It is unavoidable that there are times when that will happen. My mentor gave me fair warning that it would happen, and he was right—it did. By the same token I came to realize that we also don't have a choice. In order to have relationships that are deep and close, we have to take those risks. Love and intimacy require vulnerability and humility.

From these mentors I also learned a lesson about the difference between being driven and being called. I have this driven nature that caused me to respond to every ministry need that came my way. I felt I had to, that that was what God wanted. It was revolutionary for me to find out I did not have to meet every need, but rather discern where and how God wanted me to serve him.

Another older Jesuit I considered meeting with for spiritual direction shared with me a powerful story. He told me about when he taught high school and challenged some of his students to live radically for Christ. He told them that if they were really committed they would live among the poor in the inner city. They responded to his challenge and did exactly that. At some point later, they walked away from their faith. The lesson he learned there concerned the need to minister out of the grace that is given us, and not attempt to do more out of our own strength. He concluded that he had pushed those students beyond the grace that they had at the time.

Also a factor in the equation is the deceptions of the evil one. He told me Satan does not tempt good people with bad things, but rather with an abundance of opportunities to do good. Satan would have a good person doing a bit of good here and a bit of good there, and as a result not being effective anywhere.

Another interesting lesson that has stayed with me from that time is that Jesus said he could only do what he saw the Father doing. It is therefore even more critical for us to discern what God is doing and get behind it. I learned to pay attention to what I desired to do, not what I felt I must or should do. If I felt pushed, rather than called, to minister in a certain venue, then the motivation was usually not grace.

One surprising development for me was my introduction to the Vineyard movement. Many of the undergraduates I had known from InterVarsity were attending a church that had just become a Vineyard. They related stories of healings and of God speaking through prophetic words that sounded downright outrageous to my scientific bent. One time I was reading in Matthew 11 about how John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if he was the one, and Jesus' response was that people were getting healed. The Holy Spirit used this verse to speak to me about attending Vineyard. At the time, that local Vineyard church used to meet at four in the afternoon. That worked well for me as I attended the Eastern Rite Catholic church in the morning, and Vineyard in the afternoon.

My first few months at Vineyard felt very uncomfortable. I doubted many if not all of the experiential aspects of the ministry prayer times. It seemed that all

of the experiences could be explained psychologically and sociologically. My doubts began to subside as I myself experienced positive spiritual fruit during ministry prayer times. I still felt like many of the experiences could be explained psychologically, but I started to believe that at least some were truly genuine. This is not to say that if someone experiences God in a deep way that brings tears, for example, it is either simply psychological or truly spiritual, but at the time this was all new to me and I only began to feel comfortable with it when I could clearly determine that God was at work here, and that the experiences were not all self-induced.

Signs and Wonders

Even though this experience had made me less uncomfortable, some of the stories I heard regarding healings and miracles still seemed quite unbelievable. At the very least the scientist-in-training in me was skeptical. Nonetheless I was intrigued. I decided to partner with a friend of mine from college who was working as a journalist for a Christian magazine to do an investigative report. I thought surely there must be records we could use. I had heard that John Wimber, the leader of the Vineyard at the time, kept a file of miracles that had taken place at his conferences or church. We sent him a letter asking for permission to see the records and select some of the stories for the article, and to interview the individuals involved. I was planning to attend a Vineyard Signs and Wonders conference at Wimber's church in Anaheim and asked if I could see the file then. Kevin Springer, Wimber's coauthor on his first two books, responded on Wimber's behalf and invited me to lunch where we could discuss the project. We

had a good discussion, where he talked about Wimber's conservatism when it came to assessing whether a healing took place or not. He talked especially about the question of whether a miracle occurs if someone gets healed and then relapses, and other possible challenging questions we would face with the project.

After lunch we headed back to the Anaheim Vineyard. Springer led me to an office I could use, left, and came back with a file about two inches thick. It turned out the file was not a set of uniform reports. It was rather a collection of letters (this was in the days before email) sent by people who had been healed, or parents of children who had been healed.

I did not find what I was looking for. In every case, the person was, appropriately, getting medical treatment. So how could we say the healing was due to the prayer versus the treatment? Some stories I had heard about seemed to indicate a healing beyond reasonable medical expectations. I had hoped to find those accounts and run them by a physician for a professional opinion. The dramatic stories I had heard that, even to the layman, seemed to go beyond the possibility of healing from treatment alone were unfortunately not documented in that file. Although this meant we would not go forward with that project, something else of far greater value happened in me.

The people writing were so grateful to God. Their faith was so energized. The joy of parents whose children were healed was hard to fake. Besides, why even bother to fake anything? I was deeply moved by what was happening, and began to feel new excitement about what the kingdom of God was about. The

kingdom of God was about light breaking into darkness, where the blind see and the deaf hear.

What was more powerful than the supernatural experiences at the Vineyard was the community of young people whose love for God was influencing me in a life-giving way. At the time I did not find Catholic communities like this local Vineyard church. I knew of Catholic charismatic groups, and tried to find some, but the flavor seemed more Pentecostal than Vineyard, and the more vibrant ones I knew were not nearby or were elsewhere in the country.

Once again, I was confronting how to integrate my Catholic and evangelical self and was now adding charismatic elements into my faith life. I was enjoying the modern worship in the Vineyard and, the close-knit community of peers living close by and their passion for God, as well as learning how to lead home groups from some very talented mentors. At the same time, being a Melkite Catholic was a matter of personal heritage for me. It was closely tied with my sense of family connectedness, with my love for my father and the great love I knew he had for me, and with my respect for his vibrant faith. There was also a deep sense of history that tied my family name to Eastern Christianity for centuries. Leaving that behind was not something that I was willing to consider, that is unless God was calling me to do so. When I wrestled with God over this in prayer, it did not seem like God was doing that. Instead it seemed he was calling me to maintain that connection, and this discernment brought fruit later on with bridges I would have the privilege to build. At the same time, I knew God wanted

me to continue to grow in the ways he was blessing me with at the Vineyard. I struck a balance that not everyone was entirely happy with, but as long as God was satisfied with it, so was I. For a while the Vineyard service was in the evening, so I could go to the Liturgy on Sunday morning and Vineyard in the evening. When the Vineyard service moved to mornings, I split the Sundays depending on what ministry God was calling me to in either community.

I mentioned earlier that this was very difficult for me because it caused pain for my father, but I have tremendous gratitude to the priests and pastors from both streams of churches who supported me during that time. Most Vineyard pastors were very accepting of my Eastern Christian heritage. The two Catholic priests who were my mentors at the time were the most surprisingly unbiased in their discernment with me. They could see how life giving my experience at the Vineyard was and encouraged me to continue with it. God had many gifts for me from both communities in terms of values. Volumes have been written and official dialogues have been undertaken to both define as well as bridge the theological divides between these worlds and identify commonalities and differences between Catholics and Protestants. While I learned, probably more than I wanted to, about those theological differences, what was most helpful to my relationship with God was what each tradition taught me to value. I will come back to this near the end of this story, but for now God had one very special gift for me at Vineyard. One night, during one of the Bible Studies I attended there, two new women came to the study. One of them would become my wife.

Marriage

Although getting married was not on my radar yet—I was still a full-time student—meeting Marijean changed all that. Marijean had come from a Catholic family, but had come to an adult renewal of her faith through Protestant neighbors. She had taught at a Catholic high school and participated in retreats there. She was open to and accepting of my Catholic side. Marijean was a woman whose kindness and caring was beyond what I could have imagined. She was sensitive and creative, gentle and hard-working, highly capable and creative. I could go on and on about her great qualities. I had not thought I would get married for another five to ten years and did not feel ready, but I could not let her go, and this created much tension within me. It led to much soul searching and prayer. I bless Marijean for her patience with me during that time. It was a period when God helped me recalibrate my marriage plans. Marijean was and is a remarkable woman. I had never met anyone like her. I proposed to her in 1987 and we married in 1988.

One thing God taught me during this period that stayed with me was the need to communicate with Marijean even when I wasn't happy about something. I was in my pastor's kitchen one time, and he suggested I tell Marijean how I felt about something, even though it was negative. I resisted that, saying I didn't want to hurt her feelings. He took a piece of paper and tore off a small piece. He threw it on the kitchen table and said, "Notice that a small paper like that does not seem like much." But then he tore another small piece, and another and another and kept throwing them on the table. He said, "If you keep throwing a small piece of

paper on the table every day, it builds up, and after a year you have a huge mess on the table, and then something happens and it all explodes.” I got his point, and learned to tell Marijean how I felt if I was unhappy about something, focusing on conveying my own feelings. This has been a blessing for me in other close relationships as well.

I finished my master’s degree in Biomedical Engineering with a thesis on the interaction of two different kinds of eye movements. At my thesis presentation, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the committee recommended me for PhD work. I had not planned on a life in academia—I saw myself in industry instead—so I did not pursue the PhD at the time. This decision would come back to haunt me over the years. My professor offered me employment with his lab, and I worked there for a couple of years, after which I moved to a consulting company. I took this job hoping it would open doors for a new career. I was very disappointed. For a variety of reasons, I was very unhappy in that role. I began looking for another job. It was early in my career and, lacking experience, I was not having much success landing a new position.

One thing I don’t mind doing sometimes is taking risks in prayer. I had read an article in the Vineyard magazine about asking God for dreams, so I decided to pray and ask God for a dream about when I would find out that I would be changing jobs. I then had a dream in which I was telling my brother-in-law that I was changing jobs, and there were two dates in the dream. The first was my birthday, and the second was the last day of the class that I was taking. I kept looking for a job. Eventually the employer for the job that I wanted most called

me for a second interview on my birthday and then offered me the position on the last day of my class. That year, 1988, would end up being a year of much spiritual renewal.

I remember feeling at the time a great awareness of the awesome presence of God in the sky above. The best I could describe it was a feeling of “we are not alone.” My view of reality had been shaped by science, which relies heavily on probability. In most scientific disciplines, that means that if the data being explored has a greater than 90% or 95% probability of not being due to random chance, then the data can be published in a peer-reviewed paper. My thoughts on Christianity were therefore that we had a greater than 95% probability that our current experiences of Christianity, were real and not due to random chance. It was enough for me to commit my life to Jesus and follow him. However, the 5% chance remained that Christianity could be a sociological phenomenon wherein a community believes something together and provides positive feedback internally around those beliefs. When this sequence of events around my dream happened, it was clear that the truth of Christianity was well above a 99.99% probability. My remaining doubts vanished.

Since then, I have continued to learn about dreams and how God speaks in them and how to respond. I have made many mistakes in assuming that some dreams were from God when they were purely psychological. Ecclesiastes 5:3 says that “a dream comes when there are many cares.” A dream may not be revealing anything other than the events of the previous day, or some other subconscious content.

I have also made mistakes in interpreting dreams, thinking they meant one thing only to find out later they meant something entirely different. Finally, I have made mistakes in how to respond to revelation from God in dreams. This last area requires the most maturity and discernment. It is one thing to believe God has said, for example, that a particular year will be challenging; it is quite another to know what to do about it. Is it challenging because of sin in my life I need to address? Is it challenging because of circumstances that God is telling me to address in order to avoid a problem, such as Joseph preparing for seven years of famine? Or is it simply a call to prayer and perseverance? It seems that dreams sometimes raise more questions than answers. I suppose this is no different than other ways God speaks as well. When God does, however, speak about things that do come to pass at a later date, it never ceases to amaze me and strengthen my faith. It brings a sense of God's presence and activity in my life. One thing it has definitely done was to break my previous view of reality in which supernatural happenings were rare. I now live with awareness of the commonality of the supernatural, and it is an integral part of how I see the world.

One thing that developed in me during this period was a new understanding of the kingdom of God breaking into the world. I felt that somehow God's finger touched me and I was filled with light. His joy overwhelmed me. It was a period of unparalleled bliss. I felt I could not get angry at anyone. My heart grew very sensitive. Tears of joy would flow at the sound of a beautiful worship song. I became extremely aware of the tenderness of God and his affection for me. That God loved me so much was so amazing to me. I began to realize that we

often don't get excited about God's love, not because we think that God loves everybody so there's nothing special about it, but rather because we are simply clueless as to just how much God loves each of us. If we were in touch with that, we wouldn't care how many people he loved like that. We would be completely overwhelmed by how much he loved us. This period for me, unfortunately, did not last more than six to eight months.

Working at Northwestern and Having Kids

This new job was an opportunity to go back into the academic world. God had opened the door for a different job at Northwestern University's medical school. At the time the medical school had a center that provided ECG (or EKG) services to Northwestern Memorial Hospital. The center also did research at the cellular level in cardiac muscle, as well as research in heart rate variability where we looked at the patterns of intervals between heartbeats in relationship with other factors. My first assignment was to write a driver for a newly acquired laser printer, an expensive novelty at the time. I wrote software for data display on graphics monitors as well. This was a job that I enjoyed greatly—writing software to help analyze heart rate changes and supporting software used in the labs, as well as helping to edit manuscripts for publication. I stayed there for five years.

Our church life was also very life-giving. Once I broke through the barrier of accepting the supernatural aspects of Christianity, I relaxed and could enjoy the Vineyard church we were in much more. We learned from excellent pastors on Sundays and we enjoyed great worship. Marijean sang in the worship band. We went to leadership training classes and learned how to lead house groups. After

getting some of that training, Marijean and I hosted and then led two house groups. I led the Bible studies and Marijean led the worship. We enjoyed great community with like-minded couples in our church. We attended Vineyard conferences, until the kids made that difficult. I began to think that maybe I might want to do full-time ministry someday. Our passion for God was a joy to us. We shared it with many other couples our age and learned from each other. It was a sweet time.

During this time our first two children were born, both boys, and they were an immense joy to us. They changed our lives, of course. We wanted Marijean to be able to stay home with the children when they were young. However, we had bought a condominium and the mortgage amount made that impossible on my salary at the time. To supplement our income, I began teaching computer classes in the evening as a lecturer with Northwestern University's continuing education department.

I was nervous before my first day in the classroom, but I felt an encouragement from God beforehand that he had joy in me as a teacher. At the end of my first class I knew I was hooked. As I began to lecture, I could feel myself getting more and more energized and passionate about conveying the concepts I had prepared. By the end of the evening, I felt very alive, and even though it was the end of a 12 hour day, I was full of energy and joy. I had discovered that I loved teaching. I had it in my DNA. Over the next five years the student evaluations were also positive. I received a letter of commendation from the Dean.

In that role I realized that I did love research, and, combined with my love for teaching, it only made sense to go back and get a PhD. However, with two kids and a mortgage this was no longer an option. I began to feel frustration. Our church started teaching about calling, and this frustrated me even further. I could see that I was stalled. I wanted to either teach or do ministry, but neither was a possibility. I had no idea what God was going to call me into.

Shortly after my first son was born, my father ended up in ICU with life-threatening pneumonia. My very young niece, not much more than a toddler, also contracted life-threatening pneumonia at the time, which was a shock to our whole family. She had to be transferred to a children's hospital and needed surgery. Seeing her in the hospital struggling to breathe, with my sister in tears not knowing how to face the possibility of losing her daughter, was very difficult. A year or two later, my mother was hit by a car. She was in ICU for a long time. At one point we were told her heart had stopped, but the doctors kept working on her and she recovered. These episodes did not make it easy for my trust in God to grow. One question that came out of that for me, and had some of its roots in the instability of my pre-teen experiences, was just how much was God in control? Could he be trusted? Could prayer make a difference? Or was it up to me to make my life what I wanted it to be? These questions would become central in my wrestling with God over many years.

The condo we had bought in Evanston was not a good idea in the long run. We had quickly become house rich and cash poor. It was a very nice building to

be in and a nice condominium for a couple without kids, but once the children came, our desire to move out and be in a house increased dramatically.

Twenties

Having children changed not only our financial situation, but also our ability to travel. We could no longer go to conferences as easily now that we had two children under the age of five. We did discover, however, that we could use long drives in the car to listen to conference tapes. We also had a few basic lessons about money God wanted to teach us. The nice condominium we had bought was consuming more than 50 percent of our income. We really wanted a house with a yard for the kids, but it seemed well beyond our means. I had taken on that part-time job teaching and another one consulting. Even though I had significantly increased our income within a few years, money kept going out as fast—or faster—than it came in.

We drove to Montreal on vacation in 1992 to see my relatives there. Before leaving we asked around for a good set of conference tapes, and we heard good things about a series by James Ryle, pastor of a Vineyard in Colorado, called “Breaking the Spirit of Poverty.” When he mentioned a verse (Haggai 1:6) that spoke of how the Israelites made money and put it in purses with holes in them, he had my attention. That is exactly how I felt—that I was putting money in purses with holes in them. So I listened intently as the Holy Spirit spoke to us through the tapes.

The main point of the tapes was that Christians should tithe 10 percent of their gross income, and give all of it to their main church. Any additional offering

could then go to missionaries and other ministries and charities. We were tithing off the net and not giving it all to our church, so we had to make some changes.

At the same time God was showing us that our use of credit cards needed to stop, and so we stopped. From that time forward we made a budget, and we would only charge what we could immediately pay off without interest. As we did those things, our financial situation improved and we were able to afford our first home in Morton Grove.

Personal Spiritual Practices

My relationship with God continued to grow and deepen. I used to take the train to work, and I would have an uninterrupted twenty-five minutes to read and pray. The train had two levels, and the second level had a row of individual seats that were ideal for privacy. This was satisfying, and the consistency was a great gift, but it seemed God was inviting me to more. God was teaching our whole church to be more passionate about prayer. I tried to set aside a significant chunk of time to pray in the morning. That was an abysmal failure, for two reasons.

First, it seemed that no matter how early I got up, my preschooler son got up just as I started praying. Second, it seemed that I was spending much of the time using prayer to get God to give me the life I wanted, and keep away the bad things I did not want. I was in some ways falling into the trap of James 4:3 “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” Needless to say, that did not help my sense of intimacy with God very much. It did not leave space for sharing my

feelings with Jesus. It did not give me a chance to be still and hear his voice. This attempt at longer prayer times lasted at most a week or two. I was still far from finding comfort and joy in prayer at a deeper level.

Coming Work Changes

In the fall of 1992 I had been working on Steve Jobs's next creation after he had been fired from Apple: the NeXT computer, operating system, and application development environment. A large healthcare company in the area was looking for individuals with that kind of experience. The future of the department I was working in at Northwestern was in doubt, and it seemed our jobs there were in question, so I applied to that company and I was offered the job.

Changing Jobs, Growth in Faith and Prayer

The first couple of years at that job included many changes for me. Not only had I moved from academia to industry, but I was also promoted to management, we moved our family to our first house, and we had our third son. Those were a lot of changes to absorb in a short period of time. The commute was no longer by train; I had to drive, and this changed the dynamic of my prayer life. I could no longer count on my commute time to read anything or pray the way I preferred. I didn't stop praying, but I did stop reading for a while, and prayer became a series of requests that was not life giving. I could feel my relationship with God getting colder. Eventually, my prayer times were reduced to memorized routine prayer requests I would lift up to God on my way to work. Not bad, but

they were not very satisfying. There were also lessons to be learned that started in the previous stage and continued in this one however, and they were important ones in my life as a disciple of Jesus. In fact, they were some of the most spiritually formational lessons.

Much of what I learned came from wrestling with whether I could trust God in the middle of things I was anxious about. My pre-teen years had subconsciously instilled in me a sense of a world where God did not appear to exercise much control, at least not the way I would have liked him to. In my young adult years, whether it was about a child's fever that was taking too long to break, or my mother barely hanging on to her life in the ICU, or any other of life's unknowns that can so easily bring worry and anxiety, I wrestled with God about where he was in the midst of it, whether and how much he was in control, how much impact did prayer have, and whether I could trust him with the outcomes. God was faithful to teach me a number of things I will now share in some detail. Each of these lessons was a stepping stone in expanding my outlook and helping me outgrow the tension I felt between wanting to believe in God's care and sovereignty on the one hand, and my tendency to doubt that he wants to watch over the things I worry about in my day to day experiences on the other.

Lesson One: Sometimes Hardship Is Part of God's Plan

The first thing I believe I needed to learn was that even if I prayed about something, and even if I did everything right, God might still want me to go through negative circumstances. It could be exactly his will. I had to learn to stop

fighting against these difficult circumstances and to ask God for the strength to go through them. That does not mean, of course, that I could not ask him to lift them from me or do all I could to change them. It did mean, that after I prayed about them and did what I reasonably could, I needed to rest in God and not continue to feel like he didn't hear me or to double my prayer efforts until he fixed everything. I needed to change my thinking that held that just because the situation is bad, therefore it is not God's will. The new model I learned I understood to be very biblical: Paul asked three times for the thorn to be taken from his side, and Jesus asked three times in Gethsemane for the cross to be taken from him. Both times the answer was no, and both Jesus and Paul surrendered to God in those circumstances.

For the longest time, I had no place for suffering in my view of God. Yet it is central to Christianity. I was finally learning a theology that included how God wanted me to view and respond to suffering in my life. The Bible says that God does ordain some suffering in our lives. Jesus' sufferings were ordained by God. Hebrews 12:4-13 also speaks of suffering that is ordained by God so that we may learn from it. We know that Jesus describes a pruning process to increase our fruitfulness (John 15). No doubt God takes no more pleasure in the pruning than a parent taking their child to get vaccinated, yet he does it out of love.

Lesson Two: Offering Thanks in Difficulty

The next thing was for me to learn to offer thanks in the middle of difficulty. I learned to give thanks in advance for how God would use difficulty

for my good and for the good of others. This brought me face to face with an important theological truth that I had not yet experienced in my walk with God. During that time, I went on my first guided prayer retreat at a Franciscan retreat center. It was there that I came to that realization. I finally understood that the famous Romans 8:28 passage does not stop at verse 28. I had to read on to the next verse, Romans 8:29. God does use all things for the good of those who are called according to his purpose, and his purpose is that they are conformed to the likeness of Christ. The ultimate good that God was using all the circumstances in my life for was to become more like Christ.

Lesson Three: Submitting to God's Transforming Work

This opened a whole new door of understanding for me. God was using difficulties in my life to make me more like Jesus. Jesus' suffering resulted in resurrection and redemption. I could therefore look to my role model, my Lord, in suffering. I have to say I have very far yet to go to be so surrendered. I do not have the faith for it at times. At other times, I do not have the love for it. I do not have the love that motivated Jesus. Sometimes when I am going through difficult times, all I want is for the struggles to go away. I don't care about becoming more like Jesus. Then I have to remind myself that he is the one I follow, and if that is where he is taking me, then whether I am happy about it or not, that is exactly where I want to be.

It becomes in a way a question of obedience. I needed to learn a certain kind of obedience of attitude, to accept from God both the hard and the easy

times, not just the easy. I had to accept that a servant is not above his master (Matthew 10:24). I had to also accept that it is not up to me to say when enough is enough. Jesus said that a servant is only dismissed when his master says so (Luke 17:7-10), and I needed to accept that in humility.

Lesson Four: Trusting God

Jesus suffered for our benefit, and we are called to share in the sufferings of Christ. Somehow, in sharing in his suffering there is benefit for us and for others as I described above. In the middle of suffering it is very difficult for me to remember this. It requires tremendous trust, which in turn requires great faith. Without faith, the book of Hebrews says, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith seems central to friendship with God (for example, in Abraham's life). It is a gift and can be asked for, yet it must be exercised and result in action. It is a simple thing, yet indeed powerful enough to move mountains.

Jerry Bridges from the Navigators wrote a good book, *Trusting God* (Bridges 1988), specifically dealing with this subject. His book is based on three spiritual truths: first that God is fully sovereign, second that he is infinitely wise, and third that he is perfect in love (Bridges 1988, 18). He says that trusting God is much harder than obeying him in matters of righteousness. I tend to agree wholeheartedly. It has been my greatest spiritual challenge.

Lesson Five: The Reason to Trust Jesus

One story from this period highlights some of what God was teaching me about trust. Marijean was pregnant with our fourth child. When she went to a regular checkup, she got the news that something was very wrong. I was on a business trip to Dallas. She left me a voicemail at work hoping I'd pick it up from Dallas. I did, and immediately I saw a group of colleagues heading for the airport, so I got a ride with them and flew standby on the next plane to Chicago. This was in the fourth month of Marijean's pregnancy. A second and more sophisticated ultrasound was ordered by the doctors. It showed that there were at least ten abnormalities in the baby's development, some of them very serious. The specialists said the chances of a live birth were 50 percent. Even if the child was born alive, the chances of surviving the first year were only 10 percent. In the eighth month of the pregnancy, the child died and was stillborn. This was an exceedingly difficult time for my wife. It was not easy for me either.

This occurred right in the middle of my questions about what it meant to trust God. My wife now had her own struggle, trying to make sense of what happened. Shortly after that experience, we were driving south on the I-294 highway and having a deep discussion about what it means to trust God. I was telling Marijean about a thought I had been working on. I felt that trusting God in difficulty meant that no matter how bad a situation, God can bring out of it a greater measure of good.

The I-294 is a toll road. As we pulled up to the tollbooth in our blue Voyager minivan (it should have been yellow for lemon), Marijean said, "But can

you really trust God?” I was trying to pay the attendant on my left and continue my conversation with Marijean on my right, but the attendant wouldn’t take my money. Finally, she pointed to the car ahead and said, “She paid for you.” The words hung in the car with the weight of incense. It was a moment of God clearly speaking to us, in great blessing, that we could trust him because of what he did at the cross. He had paid for us.

One thing we had not been aware of was how quickly the odds of having a baby with genetic defects increase after age 35. The stillbirth turned out to be the result of a severe case of Down’s Syndrome. Although we had three healthy boys, Marijean and I both wanted to try for a fourth child. It was scary to try again. We prayed a lot, and many people prayed for us. With great joy, in the following year we welcomed our daughter and fourth child into our family.

Lesson Six: Laying Down Your Life

Another story from this period that helped to shape my thinking comes from Philip Yancey’s book *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Yancey 1995). At the time I read it, it opened my eyes in a new way to what it means to follow Jesus. In the book Yancey tells of the people the world calls “blessed,” the rich and famous. In his capacity as a reporter he had many chances to interview such people, and he came away with the conclusion that many whom the world calls blessed are, in his words, “as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are incurably dependent on psychotherapy. In a

heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by self-doubt” (Yancey 1995, 118).

On the other hand, Yancey describes people he calls servants, who are highly gifted and could be earning high salaries, and instead run homeless shelters or work among leprosy patients in rural India. The servants had a quality of joy and depth that he had not experienced among the rich and famous. He had no doubt which group of people he would prefer to be with (Yancey 1995, 118).

Yancey refers to one of Jesus’ most often repeated sayings, that if you try to save your life you will lose it. If you want to save it, then lay it down for Christ (Yancey 1995, 125). There’s a lot of debate, I’m sure, about what it looks like to give up our lives for Christ. The answer is probably as individual as each of us. Yet the concept is pretty clear, and I find it very true. I am much more drawn to people who have laid their lives down for Christ than those who have pursued their own fame and fortune. In some ways trying to make my life the comfortable safe and fun journey I wanted was like trying to “save” the life that I had built for myself, and that focus was misplaced.

A Jesuit priest once told me that as we die to our false self, our true self emerges. I have noticed that as I struggled with this, I ended up giving up things that were not really me anyway—things of status and ideas of me that were maybe others’ expectations of how I should be. As I laid them down, the true me began to emerge, and is still emerging.

I had also noticed that people who had lived through suffering with God seemed to have a greater personal effectiveness in ministry. I began to see more

clearly the connection that God uses suffering to make us more like Jesus, and the more like Jesus we are the more effective our ministry to others would be.

Lesson Seven: The World Is Not Completely Random and Crazy

One area where I found it particularly difficult to trust God was the whole idea of sin. Beyond what God chooses to control, it is clear that he allows us to sin. We can suffer because of the sin of others, and our own. We can also suffer for lack of wisdom by making foolish decisions. How does God protect us from the sin of others without infringing on their free will? Does he provide any kind of protection at all? I mentioned earlier that these questions about the extent of God's sovereignty and his control over the events of our lives was a central one for me. My mentor constantly encouraged me to let go and trust God. Unfortunately, these were words that are taking a lifetime for me to learn the meaning of. It was as if he spoke a foreign language.

When I was finally able to accept suffering (at least some of the time) and "die to myself" (at least some of the time), the idea of a random world that no one can control, filled with sin and accidents, still seemed a challenge to reconcile with trusting God.

To a significant extent the world really is unpredictable. Much of life is beyond our control. The more I could accept that, the better off I was. This left me with a nagging question, however: Where was God in all this randomness? Where was he in a world where a child's life could be so immediately threatened by pneumonia? Where was he when a driver with a suspended license could hit my

mother and almost take her life? Where was he when my father was wounded and our home looted?

One day as I was driving home, I asked God this question for the millionth time: “Are you in control?” This time I felt more clearly something I had been sensing for a while: that I was asking the wrong question. I distinctly felt God saying to me that the question to ask him is not “Are you in control?” but rather “Are you in charge?” Some years later I was reading *A New Kind of Christian*, a book by Brian McLaren, where he pointed out that we think of God being in control in the modern technological sense, where every aspect of an assembly line operates under precise control, whereas the biblical image of God being in control is more like that of a sovereign monarch (McLaren 2001, 23). This resonated with me and with what I felt God had said to me. Like a reigning monarch, God has authority over his creation. He may act sovereignly or he may not. He can be appealed to, and in response he can change things, and so on.

This understanding also fit with a strong impression I once had when sailing with my son. We were in a small sailboat just large enough for two people, a Sunfish. He was about six years old. We had been invited for a week to a cottage in northern Michigan right on a beautiful lake. The water was calm, there was a slight breeze, and it was a beautiful early evening. As we sailed closer to the cabin where we were staying, I asked my son if he wanted to try his hand at sailing and he enthusiastically said yes. I let him hold the rope that pulled in the sail and showed him how pulling it in tighter made the boat go faster, and releasing some rope made the boat go slower. A stronger gust of wind came up

and I asked him to let go more rope, or something to that effect, to slow down the boat. Unfortunately, he misunderstood me and let go of the rope completely. The sail swung outward quickly and jerked the boat. It was scary for him. What he did not know, however, was that I was holding the other end of the rope behind my back. I stopped the sail before it went too far and tipped the boat. I felt God say, “You worry so much about covering all the bases for yourself and your family, but I've got the other end of the rope.” It's an image I try to hang on to.

This story is particularly meaningful to me because it helps to address the sin issue I mentioned earlier. God did create a cause and effect world. He does not suspend that cause and effect to make sure he protects us. He allows us to experience the effects of our actions, for good and for bad, as well as the effects of others' actions. However, there is a limit that he places. He holds the other end of the rope in his hands so that the boat does not turn over when he does not want it to.

This feels somewhat similar to the “hedges of protection” that are described in the book of Job. In that Bible story, God places certain limits around a man named Job. These limits prevent Satan from harming Job in certain areas of his life. For example, there are limits that keep his property from being raided, limits that keep his family safe from natural disasters, and limits that keep him healthy.

In the story of Job God removes those limits for his purposes for a time. I suppose the same would be true today; he may choose to remove protection temporarily for his purposes, but otherwise it is there through those “hedges of

protection.” There are also things that the Bible says influence these limits, and I’m sure I don’t know all of them. The few that come to mind are blessings for faithfulness (or lack thereof) of previous generations (Exodus 20:4), the prayers of others, our own sinfulness, and so on. Some of these limits may be manifested by assigned angels (Genesis 48:16).

Lesson Eight: Deepening Prayer to Grow in Faith and Trust

I have described some of the fruit from this season as learning about obedient endurance, trust, and thanksgiving. A different area of fruitfulness developed for me in prayer. God seemed to be saying to me that my lack of trust in him would get better if I spent a more consistent and longer time with him. I understood this to be different from praying that bad things would not happen. This time around I knew that prayer would help me to learn to trust God through whatever suffering he would allow to come my way. I could feel that affirmation in my spirit. My mentor at the time indicated he felt the same to be true, and he encouraged me to spend thirty minutes to forty-five minutes a day in prayer, and to read Christian spiritual writing in addition to the Bible. I was not yet ready to do that.

Still, it seemed that I was beginning to see a pattern. The spiritual lives of many whose books inspired me in prayer, seemed to recommend a dose of daily prayer of one hour a day at least for lay people. There were things in those books I disagreed with, because some seemed to imply a mandate of how long one should pray, or a method of personal prayer as superior to others. I had tried praying for

an extended period on a regular basis, but it had not worked. Two shifts were about to happen in my thinking about prayer, almost at the same time, that would really help me move forward.

A significant turning point happened for me when I felt God point out that I needed to ask him for the grace I needed to pray, rather than try to do heroic attempts at prayer in my own strength. What I needed was grace from God to pray, and it seemed God was inviting me to ask for it. Richard Foster in his book on prayer (Foster 1992, 8) says that we pray by the grace that is given us. God seemed to emphasize this for me through a dream I had.

In this dream, I was trying to play the violin, but the violin was too small. Every time I would begin to play a tune, it would slip from my hands, interrupting the melody. A white-haired maestro came by and took the violin from me. He held it up and said, “This violin is too small for you. You need to ask your father for a bigger violin.”

The meaning of this dream was unmistakable. My earthly father had wanted badly for me to learn how to play the violin. That told me that the dream was about something my heavenly father wanted badly for me. In the dream the thing that my father wanted for me kept getting interrupted because it was not the right size. That in turn told me that something my heavenly father wanted for me kept getting interrupted because it was not big enough. I recognized what it was immediately: my prayer time was not long enough. I could see the correlation right away because by the time I would start to feel a connection with God in prayer, the prayer time would be over. I was just not setting aside enough time.

What was even more valuable were the words that the maestro spoke: “You need to ask your father for a bigger violin.” It seemed God was saying I needed to ask him for the grace to set aside that time. It was not going to be something that I could do on my own. That had been the problem in my previous attempts to respond to God’s invitation. I had tried to do it through sheer will and determination. That had failed miserably. What I needed was grace from God to pray, and God was inviting me to ask for it.

The other shift at that time happened when I thought to ask God what he wanted for me in prayer, rather than setting my own goals. I proceeded to ask him the question. Getting an answer from God on this was less difficult than I expected. I felt an inner conviction that God wanted at least forty-five minutes, and that an hour would be better. It was clear to me also that this was in addition to spiritual reading time. The next step was to ask for grace to do this. I began to ask for the grace to pray five or ten minutes longer each week, until I reached what I felt was God’s goal for me. The result was a tremendous blessing. I felt that I began to know what it was like to be a friend of God. My spiritual director had told me that this would help me develop an affection for God. He was right. If there is anything I would like to pass on to others, in addition to the knowledge of God, it would be to know him in prayer. I have found it most helpful to work out with God what his heart’s desire is for me in prayer at each stage of my life. This approach would later form the basis for how I would mentor others in prayer.

In the related area of spiritual reading time that my mentor suggested, I found during this period that reading a couple of pages in one or two books in

addition to Scripture went a long way toward helping me grow and have a life-giving relationship with God. This was not included in my prayer time, however. I did this before I engaged God in prayer. This combination of practices lasted approximately fifteen years until God started to call me into different prayer patterns and practices that involved more stillness and less conversation.

The benefits of this kind of investment in prayer have been life changing for me. The sense of being in touch with God and his overall sovereignty in my life began to grow. I don't know if it was the greater surrender or the investment in personal spiritual practices that bore fruit, or maybe it was the combination of both, but I began to see an increase in answered prayers. This in turn helped my faith. My confidence that God's plans for my life would not be derailed by sin, by accidents, or by illness began to grow.

What did I do during this prayer time? I would read some Scripture, as well as a Christian book, for about ten to fifteen minutes. I would then move into a time of conversation with God. I made a conscious choice to stay away from prayers to get God to give me the life I wanted, and keep away things I didn't want, like I used to. I also avoided prayer lists. All of those things I had realized were draining for me in prayer. I still prayed for my family, for the church, and for others on my list, but that was during my drive to work. My prayer time at home was dedicated to building my relationship with God by talking with him about things that were emotionally salient for me at the time. If something was on my mind, I prayed about it. The things that weighed on me I would talk to God about.

I have learned additional lessons about prayer that may be worth sharing at this point. The first is that God rewards prayer. Jesus himself promises that (Matthew 6:6). I have come to believe that God rewards prayer both in this life and in the life to come. Seeing the benefits of prayer in my life helped me see what those rewards were like in this life. I began to get excited about God's rewards. If they were this good in this life, how much better would they be in the next? It became more and more a central focus for me to live a life in pursuit of eternal reward.

Let me comment about legalism before I move on. Having told others my story and encouraged many to pray, I do understand that the first reaction of most people is that of guilt, followed closely by shame, mixed in with a sense of failure and utter defeat when it comes to daily prayer. Please do not read this in any way, shape, or form as a condemnation of your failures in prayer. I have been there, and sometimes still find myself there. Be of good cheer: God's grace makes prayer joyful. Ask for God's grace, and don't go beyond the grace you are given. My hope is that you will come to a place of experiencing prayer that will be life-changing through God's grace, not by white knuckling it through on your own strength. I know that the latter never worked for me.

It was also during this period that God began to show me how much the dislocation of my childhood years had affected me. I began to see how much I had pushed my grief over the disruptions and instabilities of my pre-adolescent years under a blanket of intellectualism. Henry Nouwen writes about a mid life movement from sorrow to joy. He speaks of the importance of grieving our

losses, and how not doing so can create bitterness (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 872-873 of 2649). I began to grieve more freely, and lean into the pain until the grief had passed. It was my path to a new resurrection in my spirit, a letting go that brought a new dawn of joy and more trust in God.

Ministry Involvement

I felt God leading me once again towards ministry with the local Melkite church during this period. A door opened for me to come and speak to their young adult group, which I did. The response was very positive. As a matter of course, I offered follow-up with a regular Bible study. What resulted went far beyond my expectations. I met with a group of eight people or so and it became a special experience. We met as a discipleship group for three years, and developed strong spiritual friendships that brought us closer to God and to each other. Unfortunately, Marijean's involvement was limited because of the age of our kids at the time. She did, however, help train one of the young adults who was a musician to write songs and lead worship in the group meetings.

Career, Family, Prayer Retreats

I had initially gone to a healthcare company in the winter of 1993 to work on instruments used in diagnostic labs. After five years, I began to see many more opportunities of interest to me within the company on the Information Technology (IT) side, and I decided to make the move to that career path in 1998.

During my time in IT, I led various technology departments in support of business needs of the company. In addition to technology, I had two opportunities

to pursue nontechnology leadership roles. The first was leading a rotational program within the company for newly hired college graduates. This included hiring and mentoring—two of the most valuable skills I felt I could contribute to the company. Even though this did not work out and I ended up not taking the position for other reasons, the discernment process taught me a great deal. The input from my peers and mentors was extremely valuable. I came to realize that mentoring was part of what God had put in me, and that I should not ignore it. Three years after this opportunity, I had another chance to apply for a role that involved a lot of mentoring and hiring of project managers. This time the opportunity worked out, and God's blessing in this for me lasted seven years.

Family Happenings During This Period

In prayer I had adopted the practice of listening to God, quieting my busy thinking to see if there was a verse or image or impression that God wanted to use to communicate to me. I was aware that while I might sometimes confuse my own thoughts and desires with what God wanted, at other times I understood events and impressions as arising from God. Learning to tell the difference is not something anyone can claim to do perfectly, and I have learned to accept that even though I make mistakes, it is still worth taking the time to listen to God. What is important is to hold things loosely, and continue to exercise the same rules of discernment that apply to other ways God speaks (e.g. is it Biblical? Is it in line with church teaching? Is there wisdom in it? Does the wise counsel of more mature Christians support it? Is there a sense of inner peace about it?)

Etc...). One day I was praying and asked God if there was more he wanted me to do in teaching our own kids about him. I stopped to listen, and the word “Philadelphia” came strongly to mind. The city's name means the city of brotherly love. I thought maybe God was saying I should pray for and teach my kids to love each other more. A more striking meaning hit me as I drove to work that day. I was listening to a Christian radio show by Elisabeth Elliot, a writer whose books taught me a great deal about how to learn from God in the midst of suffering. She talked about how she had grown up in Philadelphia. That caught my attention! Then she said that her father used to lead the family in daily devotions every morning after breakfast, with Bible reading, prayer, and singing hymns. Given what I was praying about when I got the word “Philadelphia,” I took this as God’s answer.

I adapted the pattern that Elliott’s father used for their morning devotions to our own family’s needs. I tried to be faithful to what God was leading me to do. When I first told the kids, the reaction was not very positive, as might be expected. My youngest daughter, who was two or three and didn’t know what devotions were, chimed in saying “no delotions, no delotions.” Fortunately, the response improved as the kids saw that I engaged their thoughts, wanted their input, and let them lead at times.

Another thing I had tried to do was to spend time with each of the kids individually, starting at a young age. I wanted to proactively invest in my kids. We would go out for a doughnut or a kid’s meal at McDonald’s. They called it “time alone with dad” and would fight over whose turn it was. As they grew up

we went to Starbucks instead of McDonald's, but the idea was the same. With each child I also did a discipleship program I had learned from Dr. Jerry Reed at North Park seminary called *Discipleship Encounters* (Reed 1993). He had developed it from Navigators materials, and I tried to pass it on to the kids. It is a program that can be completed in ten to fifteen weeks. I don't know how consistent I was, as the stresses of life waxed and waned during each child's growing up years. I trust the Holy Spirit used as much as fit each child's needs at the time.

This was a period of great joy for me. I very much enjoyed my job, and my children's teenage years. Some of them were athletes, others actors, and all love music. There were innumerable basketball games, swim meets, and volleyball games and tournaments. I was a passionate fan at the volleyball games—I hope not too embarrassingly so for my kids' teams. I also enjoyed watching my children in musicals, choirs, and variety shows, and the rock shows their youth group put on. At one point I counted seven guitars in my house, not to mention basses, electric pianos, drums, amplifiers, and more. When my kids would come home from college, half the living room was filled with musical equipment. I loved everything about that time—the noise, the friends coming through the house in large droves, the constant negotiations teenagers put you through, and so on.

One summer, my wife, two of my teenage sons, and my daughter wanted to try out for a community theater production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* musical. I decided to join them. It was a marvelous summer experience for all of

us. My second son invited a young woman from the ensemble to church. She came, and she came to faith. Marijean and I had her over for dinner regularly for a few months to go through the discipleship program that I had done with each of my kids. She ended up dating my oldest son, and they got married when they graduated from college.

Learning to Do Prayer Retreats

During that time, around 2003, I had a friend who was a pastor for small groups at a large church. He was someone who loved prayer. He understood the need to rely on God for fruitfulness in ministry. He used to take eight-hour retreats once a month to pray for his ministry. He invited me to join him at one of them. After the first time, I was hooked.

Although I could not go every month, my friend and I developed a routine. We would drive together to the retreat center and catch up on our life events in the car, then when we checked in at the center we each got our own room. If we saw each other on the nature trails during the day, we did not talk so as not to interrupt each other's prayer time. Lunch was the only exception, where we would talk about our morning's prayer experience. On the way home we would debrief as well. It seemed that almost every time I went on a day's retreat something of significance happened for me spiritually. I began to integrate these retreats into my annual rhythms.

One significant event happened on a rare occasion when I took a two-day prayer retreat. I was praying about maximizing the rest of my life for God. I asked

God how I could relieve the most suffering in the world. How could I best maximize the investment of my remaining years? I was thinking that given how God had made me, and given the experiences and skills I had, he would know how to get the biggest return on investment in my life. I wasn't sure whether it would be starting an organization that would live beyond me, or investing in a model of ministry that focused on multiplication through others, or something else entirely. I felt God's answer to me was to focus instead on being a loving person. It reminded me of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: what good is it if I speak with tongues of angels, but do not have love? I shared this with one of my friends, who pointed out to me the saying from one of the Desert Fathers: "Learn to love and change the world."

Parallel Changes

Life does not move in one straight narrative. Multiple threads are happening at the same time, yet a person can only narrate one of those threads at a time. At this point I will depart from the narrative for a few chapters in order to cover some larger themes and arcs of my life that took shape over a longer period.

During this season, starting around 2001, my wife and I felt the desire to move to a smaller church, where our service could be of greater benefit, we could be less specialized in ministry, and we could exercise different spiritual gifts. I was at a comfortable place however, and was not as eager to pay attention to this desire within me. I wanted to stay and continue to enjoy it. We continued our discernment and made our decision to look for a smaller church. We ended up at Grace Evangelical Covenant Church. There we served in the various capacities

we had hoped for. The most significant aspect of this move for me, however, was that it opened up a new set of possibilities for the future. At that church I met a number of people who would later be instrumental in encouraging me to pursue seminary education and my heart's passion for mentoring. We stayed at the church for a very joyful four years. At the end of that time, our kids were almost all in junior high or high school. They had never left their friendships at the Vineyard and now wanted to be a part of the youth group where their friends were. When kids actually want to go to church, we didn't want to argue too much, and so we went back to the Vineyard. Now that our children are finished with high school, we have again joined a smaller church, helping with a Vineyard church plant.

Evangelism and Discipleship

In the first few months after I came back to Christ in 1981, I shared the gospel enthusiastically. I drew the diagrams from the Four Spiritual Laws on napkins, computer paper, and notebooks and shared with as many friends and family as would listen. I found out some interesting things as a result. First and foremost, it seemed that just because people understood the gospel, it did not mean they believed it. Second, even if they did believe it, they did not necessarily want to commit to following Jesus. Third, for those who did commit, the decision had nowhere near the impact in their lives that it had had in my own life. I had been resistant to the idea of evangelism until the episode with the InterVarsity apologist I mentioned earlier. After that experience, my passion returned, and I went back to intellectual persuasion as the main mode of evangelism.

I took much of that same approach of persuasion into the retreat ministry in my early twenties that I have described in a previous chapter. Then came John Wimber. He was the leader of the Vineyard church movement at the time, and had pioneered a model of evangelism he termed *Power Evangelism* and written a book with that title (Wimber and Springer 1986). The model essentially said that prayers for healing, when answered, opened the door in people's hearts for the gospel. I tried that, too. I prayed for people who were sick, and a very small number indicated they were healed, but their openness to the gospel did not change appreciably. I do admit that the key word is *appreciably*, and by that I mean appreciably enough for me. It does not mean, of course, that my evangelism did not plant a seed that later came to bear fruit without my knowledge.

Then came a powerful shift in how I viewed evangelism. Alpha is a ten-week basic Christianity course that is run in churches from multiple denominations. Its developer, Nicky Gumbel, had sent the materials to forty-four denominations and removed what each found objectionable. Rather than a watered-down set of common denominators that often emerges with compromise, what came out was a curriculum of clear-cut foundations of Christian belief.

One of the Eastern Rite Catholic priests I knew had earlier asked me if I had heard of Alpha. He was drawn to the format, which included building a sense of community each week around a shared meal, because it mirrored the high value of hospitality that Middle Eastern immigrants continued to express in the United States. I had heard about it but did not know very much. Sometime after his question, I received an invitation to an Alpha conference in the summer of 1998.

We had just moved to a new house, I still don't know how Alpha got my new address, but somehow they sent me a flyer for the conference, and I went. The experience would change my view of evangelism for good.

The first thing that caught my attention at the conference was the great variety of Christian churches represented in the audience. Nicky Gumbel would ask people to raise their hands as he called out denominations. There were mainline Protestants and evangelicals, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, charismatics and Salvation Army, and more. This excited me to my bones. As the conference progressed it became clear to me that this was an effective approach to evangelism and discipleship. Alpha sees evangelism as a process that includes the initial steps of discipleship. Nicky Gumbel prefers the Catholic term "evangelization" for that reason, because it implies a process.

In Alpha this process happens in a highly relational environment where attendees are encouraged to work out their own answers rather than simply look to the leader for an answer. The leader's role is one of a facilitator, no more. This was new to me. I had been taught to present the gospel and answer questions; It turns out, as I learned from Alpha, that this approach, though valid and legitimate in some cases, may not be the best in other cases. At times it can make people feel pressured, which is of course not at all what I wanted.

I first ran the Alpha course with a pastoral intern who had attended the conference with me. He then moved to another city and I took over. With each round, it seemed the effectiveness of the course improved. Each time believers who attended deepened their faith, and some nonbelievers came to know Christ,

though of course not all of them. It was especially rewarding to see a couple of those new believers deepen in their faith and take on leadership roles ministering to others. Word started to get around, it seemed, at the pastoral network level, and I began to get requests to train other churches' Alpha leaders. It was also rewarding to see others avoid mistakes we had made as they began and grew their Alpha course.

Running Alpha was not without personal cost. It is a ministry that requires significant administrative and prayer investments. It is also stressful for the first few weeks at least until attendance stabilizes. It can feel like everything is going great one week with eighteen attendees, and terrible the following week when it's down to twelve. After a few years of running Alpha courses and training teams from other churches, it seemed God was once again opening doors for me and inviting me to minister in the Eastern Rite Catholic Church I had grown up in. In response, I invited some of the leaders that had emerged from the discipleship group I had led there to come and train with us on the next Alpha course and learn how to run it. A number came and did so.

After that course was finished, I worked with the priest there and with the team from that church for six months to train and plan the course for that church. When we ran it, the level of interest was so strong that the group did not want it to end. They lobbied for it to continue. I had faced this before—a great problem to have, but not an easy one to solve. I have tried "Beta" groups with mixed success. It seemed that an individual either developed faith taking root so that they were integrated into the church, or not. If not, the amount of follow-up was not

consistently a predictor of success. Sometimes it helped, other times not. It was always a choice of where to invest ministry resources, in follow up or in new outreach.

As it happened, we did run a Beta group, but as is often the case, it dwindled. I was not sure what to make of that. God had made it so clear and it had gone so well. Why did the ministry seem to end so inconclusively? The answer would come in a few years. For the time being, God was calling Marijean and me to the different church experience I mentioned earlier, one that was relatively short—only a few years long—but would have a large long-term effect as I described earlier with the Covenant church.

Spiritual Direction

I read an article in *Christianity Today* about Larry Crabb (Tennant 2003), a well-known Christian psychologist. He had begun a ministry of spiritual direction and training spiritual directors in an evangelical context. At around the same time, the pastor of the Evangelical Covenant Church we were attending invited me to attend the annual Leadership Summit conference at Willow Creek Community Church in the summer of 2005. At the end of the conference, the speaker or MC offered a challenge to act on something from the conference in the next three days. He shared a statistic that if we don't act on an item from a conference within three days, chances were that we would not end up acting on it at all.

I felt God leading me to start seminary but was not sure how to take the first step. I did not know what specifically to study and did not want to

overcommit. When I heard the challenge to act within three days, I made a commitment to talk with three specific individuals who would be knowledgeable about the academic programs available and who were experienced in the life of ministry.

Within three days I had made the appointments. To my surprise, one recommendation was unanimous from all three individuals, and was suggested by my pastor as well. They all felt that the spiritual direction program in its first year at North Park Seminary would be a good next step. The program seemed tailor made for me. The first year was one of discernment, which felt like a particularly good investment in and of itself. The second year would then be a deeper dive into the practice of spiritual direction. It was also a fully accredited seminary program, which meant that I could apply the credits earned toward further seminary education.

What was even better was the cohort format of the courses, with online work throughout the year (doable for me) and intensives at the seminary that I had enough vacation time to cover. One obstacle stood in the way: there were very few spots allocated for laypeople. There would be competition for those spots and I had no idea whether I would get one of them. I was very excited when I heard that I did get in. It seemed like God was opening the door and I planned to follow through, enrolling to start the program in 2006.

One of the first requirements of the program was to be in spiritual direction, which I had not done since Fr. Dave Hassel had passed away more than

ten years prior. I was referred to a spiritual director and I set up an initial interview with him.

The interview did not go as I had expected. I was hoping to learn about ways to pray that would help with my biggest spiritual challenge—how to trust God more intrinsically. To my surprise this spiritual director was convinced that prayer was not the path that would help me. Instead he suggested that I work through *The Artist's Way*, a book by Julia Cameron (Cameron 2002). This intrigued me. Since we had to choose a topic for a practicum in the spiritual direction program, I chose to do it on *The Artist's Way*.

I have known many to read that book, but it is only the ones who took the time to do the exercises regularly who experienced a change in their outlook. I did the exercises with the regularity the author recommended. The changes that came about in my life were surprising and totally unexpected. I found a joy in those exercises on a weekly basis. I used to set aside a few hours to do them on Saturdays. I found myself looking forward to that day more and more. It became the highlight of each week.

There were four themes in the book that were seminal for me. The first was an exercise that Julia Cameron dubs “Morning Pages.” The exercise as she describes it is to take three pages of 8.5 by 11 inch ruled paper, and simply write. She recommends that if you get stuck, just keep writing “I am stuck, I am stuck, I am stuck,” and something will come through. The point is to not stop writing before reaching the end of the third page. I modified the exercise for my purposes and I turned it into a letter to God. The only rule I gave myself was simply not to

ask God for anything, just talk to him about what was going on with me, and to rip it up afterwards so as not to censor what I wrote.

The second theme in the exercises was to engage in creativity just for the sake of it, not for the sake of an audience or a publisher. This gave me freedom to enjoy creative pursuits without worrying whether I was “good enough” or not.

The third theme was what Cameron calls “stocking the pond,” replenishing our pool of ideas for creativity by immersing ourselves in art, attending concerts, going to museums, and so on. She recommends doing this for two hours a week, alone. I was surprised how much more meaning these experiences had when I was by myself. Sharing the experience with others has its own joys, but being alone in it immersed me in a kind of “zone” I did not expect.

Finally, the fourth and most powerful theme from the exercises reconnected me with a part of my life that had lain dormant for a long time: my love of nature. I began prioritizing time away in nature settings.

The lenses with which I saw the world prior to this experience were, according to my training in science, data driven. The world is full of negative data. This had caused me to focus on images of God as someone who was only interested in developing my character and not as someone very interested in joy. As I put on these different lenses of creativity, art, and nature, I began to experience God as much more of a joyful God who loves beauty and variety beyond all imagination. I began to see that God very much wanted an abundance of joy for me, and was inviting me into it.

A year before I began my practicum, at a Vineyard conference someone who was praying for me felt that God was saying he wanted to “lift the drudgery” from my life. Indeed, that was a true word. God did lift the drudgery. When I wrote my paper summarizing the practicum experience, I titled it “The Year I Started Seeing in Color.”

Recently I read a book by Dan Allender called *Sabbath: The Ancient Practices*, where he describes Sabbath as a time of intentionally pressing into God’s joy and his creation in nature (Allender 2010). This delight that Allender portrays resonated very much with me and put the experiences of *The Artist’s Way* in the biblical context of Sabbath rest that God wants for us.

My Parents’ Passing, Preaching and Writing

In 2005, my mother broke her hip. She died two months later. At her funeral, I saw an outpouring of gratitude from so many people she had touched not only in her church but also in the Melkite Diocese in the United States. She had founded the National Association of Melkite Women for the United States, and was honored for that by the denomination. Losing her was very difficult. The grief I felt as I put together a slideshow for her wake felt overwhelming. She had been a larger than life figure. Her strength of personality and her passion were legendary. There is a picture of her in the slide show where she is in a red dress, reading the Epistle during the Melkite liturgy, that says it all. In the picture she holds the Bible in one hand, and looks straight at the audience and speaks to them directly, because she had memorized the passage in preparation. Her other hand had a pointed finger that always emphasized her points as she was teaching. Once

the pastor of a Presbyterian church who had known her told me he thought that if she had been a man with different opportunities, she would have become something like the CEO of General Motors. At her funeral, a pastor friend told me after hearing what people said about her that she thought that in a different time and in a different tradition, my mother might have been a pastor.

I think my friend was more right than the Presbyterian pastor. When I gave my mother's eulogy, I said that she was passionate about only three things: Jesus, teaching, and her family. I find myself passionate about similar things. Whenever I visited her grave, I would always leave with a greater desire to be more single minded in my pursuit of Jesus.

After my mother died, my father had a very difficult time. He began to develop dementia. At first it was very minimal, but it progressed to the point where he could no longer drive. I started taking him to the Melkite church on Sundays at least every other week. Growing up I had not appreciated St. John Chrysostom's liturgy, which is celebrated most Sundays in the Melkite tradition, too deeply. At this stage in my life, it started to grab my heart at a deeper level, and I fell in love with it.

There was a new priest at that church, who was having some difficulty with English. He had been the rector of the denomination's seminary and I had much admiration for his knowledge and personal relationship with God. Some of the leaders in the congregation at that time, how many I don't know, expressed a need for someone to preach in English, especially so that the younger generation could understand. The previous priest, whom I had led Alpha under, it seemed

had a positive impression of my ministry from that experience. He also knew I had gone to some seminary since then and I heard he suggested I preach from time to time. The newly arrived priest acted on the suggestion and made the unusual request to the bishop to have a lay person preach. The bishop agreed, as long as I submitted the sermons ahead of time to the priest for review. This quickly formed a ministry partnership between me and the new priest that continued for five years until my father passed away and the priest was transferred. I enjoyed his feedback and learned from it. He told me he enjoyed hearing my perspective, and he encouraged me to grow in my teaching gift. I tried to connect elements of the Byzantine tradition to my current experience of the gospel, and the priest was very helpful in that regard, helping me understand aspects of the tradition in a deeper way and introducing me to aspects I never knew in the first place.

During that time, in one of my prayer retreats, I thought I felt God nudging me toward writing. I was not sure how that would develop, but some opportunities did come. The Alpha course meets over a meal once a week for ten weeks. In the middle of the course, a retreat is held with a focus on the Holy Spirit. I was invited in the winter of 2010 to give the Holy Spirit retreat in an Alpha course run by the Melkite Cathedral in Boston. In preparation, I passed all my talks to the priest I preached under for his feedback. As usual he helped me highlight parts of the Melkite tradition that integrated the topics of the series. He liked the talks and asked if I would give them as a sermon series as well.

As part of the series, I began developing questions for reflection for each of the Sunday scriptural readings. These were eventually bound together and expanded for the readings of the next six years, approved by the bishop, and made available to the rest of the churches in the diocese. I dedicated the first effort to my father.

As bad as it is to watch someone you love suffer from dementia, the connection I had with my father around ministry in the Melkite Church at this time was very special. The dementia kept progressing, and caring for him became a shared responsibility between me and my siblings. The level of care he needed at first was minimal, but his needs grew with time. The dementia slowly took away his abilities until the last two to three years, when he needed a full-time caregiver. He moved in with my brother. It was when the dementia robbed him of speech that it became hardest to see him so helpless. Sometimes it seemed he understood what was happening, other times not. At times he appeared to get this look of great sadness in his eyes that would break my heart in a million pieces.

My father passed away in 2013. When I gave his eulogy, I said that his life had been far from easy, but he had an implicit faith in God's goodness and provision that never wavered. I am especially blessed by the power of my father's love. There were so many differences that separated us. Yet his love was so strong and so deep that it overcame all the many differences and disagreements we had.

God, it seemed, had one more writing project for me during this period. One Sunday on my way out of church at Vineyard, I took a few moments to look through the free booklets available to the congregation. One was about how to

pray for an hour. I picked it up and speed read through it. It was written by an old friend of mine who had moved away some years ago to pastor a church in another state.

The booklet was written from the perspective of an intercessor. I knew my friend had that gift and was passionate about it. I, on the other hand, do not have that gift. My experience of learning to pray for an hour was not the same. Praying as the booklet recommended would not work for me. God has taught me a different way to pray, more suited to how he made me and wanted to relate with me. As I looked through the booklet I felt an inner desire, a nudge to rewrite it. I dismissed this idea quickly because I was afraid it was my own ego and because I did not want to presume. It felt unfair to my friend as well.

In the summer, I like to put a lawn chair out on my driveway. There is a great tree with a beautiful shade that breaks the heat of the day. After church that day I sat out there reading, when my sister, who lives down the block, came walking by with her young son. I think he was three or four years old at the time. He was holding a copy of the same booklet. She told me he grabbed it on the way out of church because he liked the bright yellow cover; she had read it and felt that I should rewrite it. Given that this all happened on the same day, I felt God's message to me was pretty clear. I asked the pastors in charge for permission to rewrite it and they enthusiastically agreed. I rewrote it and the church made it available. As I write this, my advisor is asking me what this experience says to me. His question is stirring something deep within me that I have some fear of embracing. It would seem God has given me some things to share with his people

about personal prayer. That thought feels like a huge responsibility to be entrusted with. I hope and pray that I can be faithful to his call and do the work as God leads.

Preparing for Next Phases of Ministry

After I finished the spiritual direction program's first year in 2007, my discernment was clear. This was part of my calling. It felt like a forgotten part of me was coming alive. The second year required us to begin performing spiritual direction with supervision. This experience further convinced me that I was on the right track. After graduation, I began seeing directees regularly and found that this was a path I wanted to pursue further.

I felt a calling to take this a step further and train to be a counselor. I was feeling a call to ministry in counseling. I started to research counseling degree programs. I prayed about which program to apply for and felt God directing me to the Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) counseling program. This was not a major risk because it was a program designed for working adults. Classes met in the evenings. The program was fully accredited, and its costs were the most reasonable of the schools I was considering. I took my first class in the spring of 2009. The last year would be an internship year. I graduated in the summer of 2013.

I had heard from others that the internship year was demanding and very formational. I prayed early on for the right placement. When it came time to apply, I had made a list of thirteen potential sites. Of those, three were workable with my schedule. One was such an excellent fit, I could not have designed it

better myself. It is a private practice of about ten counselors. My prayers were answered and this group agreed to take me in for an internship. It was indeed a very formational year, as I was challenged to continue to grow emotionally, relationally, and clinically. After the internship, the practice hired me part-time to start counseling. The counselors there have an emphasis on good supervision. They work with people of different kinds and levels of faith commitment. I thought this would be the main ministry I would engage in for the coming years. God, however, seemed to have more in mind for me than I expected.

I began to feel a calling and a desire, which I believed to be from God, to look at a seminary program in spiritual formation. God opened the door for me to attend a Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University College & Seminary in Toronto with that specialty. I do not know the exact details of how God will ultimately use it, but one thing I do know however is that he has already used it to help me learn four important things about my own personal prayer life and calling to help others in theirs.

The first and second breakthroughs I had are related. I had felt God calling me for five years or so to a more meditative prayer practice. My conversational prayer life was so valuable to me, however, I just did not want to give it up. It became harder and harder to pray conversationally though, because when I would sit down to pray and try to begin talking, I would feel a strong need to be silent. It was like being at a Symphony Orchestra hall, with a brief pause of music, where words or sound of any kind were just not appropriate.

I had read much about Centering Prayer from John Keating during my training in Spiritual Direction, and I continued to try to apply it. Keating is very convinced of its benefits, but those were not immediately apparent to me. Actually they were not apparent for a number of years after I started. This made me doubt the call to meditative prayer.

In my second year of the Doctor of Ministry program, I was anxious about something, anxious enough to not be able to trust my discernment, so I asked one of my friends to pray for me, and see if he could discern what God may want me to know about the situation. A couple of days later he said to me that while praying for me, the words “God speaks in the silence” had come to him, and he did not know what that meant, but he sensed it was for me. He did not know this, but that week I had been reading a book on Christian mysticism for one of my classes, *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism: The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality* (McColman 2010, 213), and the same unusual theme was expressed there: “Contemplation is the prayer of paradox, for in it you relax your mind to listen for a God whose light comes to you as darkness and *whose word comes to you as silence* (emphasis mine)”. That was very helpful confirmation that God was calling me to this type of prayer. The other helpful thing in that class’ readings was the running theme in Christian history of mystics who sought union with God through meditative prayer.

The second and related lesson I learned was from John of the Cross. Although he is known largely for his views on the dark night of the soul, what struck me was his discouragement of any focus on receiving any consolation from

God in prayer through any type of revelation (Peers 2012, 3638-3643 of 5725). He felt that even if God said something, our ability to understand it was limited (Peers 2012, 3120-3121 out of 5725), and it was better for us to simply trust and have faith (Peers 2012, 3638-3643 of 5725). This was important to me, because I had resisted the call to meditative prayer partly because I did not want to miss out on anything God might impress upon me during that time. I am still not sure on how to integrate the two, but it was helpful in letting go of the need to be analyzing what God may or may not be impressing on me during meditative prayer times.

The third lesson helped to address the issue of trusting God that I had struggled with for many years. For thirty years I had thought that if I got my theology of the sovereignty of God and how it integrated with the freedom of will that he gives humanity, then I could relax and trust him. I am coming to realize, through discussions with faculty and other students, that we learn to trust God by experiencing his love for us in prayer. This makes sense as I recall the words of a spiritual director who told me once that I thought about God more than experienced him. It made sense given how helpful the exercises of The Artist's Way had been to me. It made sense why God would call me to meditative prayer so that I could experience more of his loving presence and address the spiritual issue I struggle with the most.

The fourth take away for me from the Doctoral program has been a growing awareness of my desire and calling to help others grow in personal prayer. When I was choosing the topic for my research project (see chapter four),

I looked at multiple options, but the one I settled on was on mentoring others in prayer. I was still asking God about this when I began to write the proposal. In doing so, I was looking for a book on prayer on my shelves, and ran across David Foster’s book on prayer (Foster 1992). It was a copy in large print I had given to my mother near the end of her life. I doubted she had read it, as later in life she preferred shorter material in the form of articles. I opened it, and there I saw her penciled in notes that she usually wrote as she interacted with a text. In multiple places, she had written “ask Nader.” That felt like a confirmation to me of my choice of topic for this project. It seemed God was using something my mother had written many years before to confirm to me the direction I was heading, to mentor others in prayer and answer their questions. This was also confirmed to be a direction I feel God is calling me to beyond this program, as I mentioned earlier regarding my advisor’s comments.

I have said earlier that I would address some of the things I learned to value from each tradition that influenced me. These of course have helped to shape my view of how spiritual formation happens, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The values that I have come to cherish from my Eastern Catholic background include the beauty and depth of the Byzantine liturgy with its historical roots and comprehensive prayers, connecting the experience of Sunday worship with the worship of the saints through many generations, as well as joining the worship of God in heaven. Second is the practice of the Jesus prayer, and how to make use of physical reminders by wearing a wrist size prayer rope that functions as a reminder to me to pray that

prayer as often as I can. I have also found it helpful to use the prayer rope to pray for others while in conversation with them or while taking a walk or otherwise occupied. A third value is that of spiritual direction, which I was blessed to have access to well before spiritual direction was known in the evangelical world. The fourth is that of a sense of connectedness to the historical faith through the tradition of faith. The particular value of this to me is that it informs my view of spiritual formation as mediated via community, and especially the modeling of the priests who spent time investing in my spiritual growth.

The things I learned to value from the evangelical side is first the importance of adult conversion or renewal for those outside the church, as well as for many who grow up in the church (acknowledging that for some it is a seamless and continuous experience of faith from childhood into adulthood). Second is the importance of processing experiences of faith in a small group setting. Verbalizing experiences of faith is important to making them more concrete and increasing their communal aspect so that they can be shaped and interpreted within the church. Third, is the practice of regular study of the Scriptures in a group as well as on a personal level. The values of daily reading and conversational prayer were also part of what I learned to value there as well, starting with InterVarsity's encouragement to have what they call a "Daily Quiet Time", that is setting aside daily time for engaging with Scripture and prayer. Finally, I learned to value the training of lay leaders to be active in ministry and the expression of their spiritual gifts.

There are things of course that have blessed me in both environments, and those would include discipleship and mentoring. Some of the mentoring was done in groups, but most of it was done in one on one settings. Both group settings and one on one settings were important for my growth, however there are some distinct advantages to dyadic relationships. The first disadvantage of a group setting is the built-in requirement to address all of the needs of the group, and provide a generic type of input that would benefit everyone, versus focusing on that of the individual's unique needs. The second disadvantage is that of the group dynamics. Every group is unique, and its dynamics change over time, and they change with every new person that joins or leaves. The leader needs to not just have something to contribute, but also be skilled at managing those dynamics. For example, a group with a member who dominates the conversation, matched with a leader who does not address the issue well, will minimize the group's effectiveness. Of course, a bad match can happen in a mentoring relationship as well, but that is one potential point of failure, whereas a group has multiple potential points of failure.

These dyadic relationships were one of the top four formational things in my life. Another of the top four has been daily spiritual practices, including both reading and prayer. These two will form the essence of much of the enhancement to the model of formation that will be developed in the next chapter, as well as the field research project in the following chapter. A third formational current in my life has been small group communities, which will be discussed in the next chapter as well. Finally, the most formational of the four, walking with God

through difficulty and suffering will be considered in the next chapter also. On a first draft of my project I had put suffering aside, as I considered it too random to include in a model. But its formative presence was not to be denied, and I have now included it as part of the model enhancements that we will now turn to.

CHAPTER 3:

PRACTICAL ENHANCEMENTS TO

WILLOW CREEK'S SPIRITUAL

CONTINUUM

Having just described the dynamics that shaped my own spiritual formation, I will now look to the empirically based Spiritual Continuum model, as well as historical models, to see how they compare and what support there may be for the Spiritual Continuum across history and across the traditions that have influenced me. In the process, I will develop some additions to the Spiritual Continuum that provides suggestions for the type of personal spiritual practices, for supportive dyadic relationships, and for the type of small groups that may be beneficial at each stage. Additionally, the role of suffering in spiritual formation is noted for each stage along the Spiritual Continuum.

Developmentalism and Spiritual Formation

It is good to begin this work with a disclaimer that we cannot guess at the mind of God beyond a certain set of observations and insights that he allows us. Therefore, what is put forth in this work is meant to provide guidance to the practitioner of ministry, not absolute directives. It is to be applied with appropriate evaluation and prayerful discernment. These insights are of course not meant to be comprehensive, as we can never put God in a box.

Another disclaimer to the practitioner of ministry is that these stages are not defined with hard boundaries. They are patterns observed and can be useful in aggregate to provide guidance and inform how we minister to individuals. The individual, however, can never be reduced to a stage. They may fit the pattern to a large degree or to a small one. It is the practitioner's role to be discerning of when the patterns described in a given model apply and when they do not.

These stages can also overlap. Furthermore, the movement from one stage to another is not always sequential, with possible reversion to an earlier stage. Finally, the practices described in each stage below can begin in one stage and continue in subsequent ones, they are not limited by a hard and fast boundary to a given stage.

One distinction to make at this point is that the focus will be on adult faith development. This is not to say, of course, that childhood and adolescent faith is not valid, but rather that this view of formation will be more limited to the experiences of individuals in late adolescence and onwards. It is hoped that by providing a greater focus, a more in-depth view of adult faith can be attained, without the added complexities of developmental topics that are more heavily intertwined with childhood and adolescent faith.

Christianity is developmental. There is no doubt about that from a Scriptural perspective. Paul writes, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11). He also provides a metaphor of the difference between teaching new believers and mature ones as the difference

between providing milk to an infant and solid food to an adult (1 Corinthians 3:2; see also Hebrews 5:12-13). A number of studies and models have emerged in a body of literature that attempt to describe the developmental path of a Christian. These appear to vary significantly depending on their historical context, the spiritual tradition they come from, and whether they are studied from a qualitative or quantitative perspective. Some of these have their foundations in developmental psychology, such as the *Stages of Faith* model developed by James Fowler, where he draws from the work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg (Fowler 1981, 39). Others provide more of a theological model such as the community development model described by John Westerhoff (Westerhoff 1980, 25-28). For theological and biographical reasons, the models discussed here will be Catholic and evangelical. In this effort the primary model used will be the Spiritual Continuum model, developed by Hawkins and Parkinson in their initial *Reveal* study (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007), which was further expanded to many more churches as described in their book *Move* (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011). This model was chosen because it has its basis in the congregational life of evangelical churches (although many others were studied as well in their research). This effort will supplement their Spiritual Continuum model, in how it reflects my own experiences of what was most formational for me, and what I have observed to be most formational in others.

The Spiritual Continuum was derived from a heavily quantitative approach, which appeals to my early scientific training. In addition, it reflects life in an evangelical setting, which has been an important part of my formation. A

more historical Protestant perspective, from the Methodist movement of John Wesley, will be looked at for comparison to see whether there are historic parallels to the stages identified in the Spiritual Continuum. This comparison will be limited, of course, by the different historical contexts, as well as the nature of the information available from each model. One is contemporary and highly quantitative, the other is a few centuries older and inferred from how John Wesley organized his movement. The Catholic side of my views of formation finds expression in some aspects of Henri Nouwen's model of formation. A more historical Catholic model will also be compared at a high level to see whether there are parallels to the other models.

The Apostle Paul's view of Christian development is mentioned above. Paul also describes how we are being constantly transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition picks up the same theme from 2 Peter 1:4 and describes a process of Theosis, becoming God-like through God's light as expressed in Ephesians 5:8 (Harpur 2005, 109). The historical Catholic monastic model that will be explored is described by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and proposes three general stages: Purgation, Illumination, and Union (Harpur 2005, 52). Nouwen's contemporary Catholic model is offered in his book *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (Nouwen et al. 2010). In this model he describes Early, Midlife, and Mature sets of movements, with two to three identifiable movements within each set.

From the Protestant tradition, the period of personal spiritual transformation identified between conversion and glorification is generally

referred to as sanctification. Although Protestant models of formation have not been prevalent in history, a model can be discerned from the way John Wesley organized his movement. In more contemporary times, the Willow Creek Association started its *Reveal* study with a sample size of 5,000 and then accumulated a very large data set (over 250,000 surveys) that describes movements between four stages of spiritual development gleaned from a Protestant churchgoing population of multiple denominations.

A model in and of itself is not sufficient, however. The more critical question is how to provide individuals what they need in order to keep growing and to move from one stage to the next. Consequently, each discussion of a particular stage will include a section on transitioning to the next stage and how that transition can be supported. This is addressed using the further findings of Hawkins and Parkinson in *Move*, the book that details the expansion of their research on the Spiritual Continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011), which looked more specifically for what variables are correlated with successful transitions. From my autobiographical perspective, the roles of personal spiritual practices of prayer and reading, dyadic relationships, walking with God in suffering, and community are essential across each of the stages, albeit in different ways. These elements will be explored, then, for how they are best expressed at each stage, and how they align with Hawkins' and Parkinson's findings or supplement them to create the practical enhancements to their Spiritual Continuum.

Community

A word about community is essential at this point because even though the larger community of the congregation is not addressed with each stage of the models being considered, it encompasses all of them. John Wesley, in his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* published in 1739 (Watson, 2008), wrote, “holy solitaries is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers.” Traditional Christianity has maintained the importance of community and communal worship. The most individualistic ascetic monastic orders recognized the need for community in the third century (McColman 2010, 122) and established practices of communal living even among those whose journeys focused on solitude. To worship together with and be part of a spiritual community that is multi-generational, as well as one where the members are at varying levels of spiritual maturity, is a spiritually forming force (Carlson and Lueken 2011, location 1456 of 2668). The small group suggestions that will be made at each stage are drawn from the larger congregation and are part of the life of the community. The mentors whose role will be especially highlighted further in this work are also a part of the life of that community and their work is a ministry from and to the individuals in that community. In a way, they represent the community as its agents for some of the work of formation that the community desires.

Communal worship in a church is not usually expressed differently at different stages of the formation process because everyone worships together, or at least that is the traditional expectation. Yes, someone in an early stage of faith

will likely experience communal church worship internally in a different way than someone at a mature stage; however, the way the communal worship is done externally is uniform for everyone. Church is composed of people at different stages, and the Sunday service is for everyone, not one stage or another. It is also not ideal to have a different church for each stage as that would break the unity of the body. The same is true of the expression of the sacraments. They are likely experienced differently in an internal sense but will be administered externally in the same way across all stages.

The question of community at a small group level is a very different story. Small groups can be done differently to support the needs of individuals at different stages. In fact, one could argue they are most effective when they are planned and tailored with that assumption in mind. The role of some types of community in spiritual formation is, then, one of the catalysts that will be examined at each stage in an attempt to describe in broad terms what may be more helpful at some stages than others.

This enhanced model is intended to be of use to pastors of adult spiritual formation, elder boards, and other church leaders working to provide avenues for growth in spiritual formation within their contexts. The disclaimers above notwithstanding, knowing the patterns that the population in general follows can help Christian leaders offer and encourage appropriate means for growth that are specific to the differing needs within their environments. It is hoped that the Enhanced Spiritual Continuum arrived at in this work, along with the suggested practices for each of its stages, will provide a tool for such ministry work.

The Models

It is now time to look at the models that I will be comparing to the Spiritual Continuum to see how well they do, or do not, align with it and with my experience. First a review of the Continuum is informative.

The Spiritual Continuum

This central model that I will look to enhance, as mentioned previously, comes from the Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois. The stated mission of the church is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The *Reveal* study was initially commissioned to ask whether that goal was being achieved. The result was the beginning of a multistage research effort. The research would eventually expand to a sample of over 250,000 completed individual surveys from over 1,000 churches (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 10).

This study first sought to define a model, named the Spiritual Continuum, showing a continuum of growth in Christian spirituality (REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey Technical Report, 2015). It then looked at which variables were associated with each of the stages and, consequently, what each group needed from the church in order to continue to grow into the next stage.

The first of the four stages in this Spiritual Continuum is called “Exploring Christ” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 21). In this stage, individuals have a basic belief in God but are not clear on Christ and his relevance in their lives. The second stage, “Growing in Christ” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 21), is where

individuals have essentially made a commitment to follow Christ, are beginning to have a relationship with him, and are learning the essentials of how to do so. The third stage, “Close to Christ” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 21), is characterized by individuals who depend on Christ daily, seek guidance from him on daily issues, and look to him for help with their lives. The fourth and final stage, “Christ-Centered” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 21), is where individuals are fully surrendered to Christ. Their relationship with him is their highest priority.

There are two additional segments that were identified in the study, the Stalled and the Dissatisfied, which are not part of the continuum per se. The Stalled group is mostly in the Growing in Christ segment (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 173), whereas the Dissatisfied are more or less equally distributed across all the stages (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 183).

Table 1. Stages identified in the Reveal study from Willow Creek (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 131, 146, 162)

Stage	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Description (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 21)	Basic belief in God; Not clear on Christ; Don't know how Christ relates to them	Have personal relationship with Christ; Committed to trust him; Just learning what it means to grow in a relationship with him	Depend on Christ daily; See Jesus as helping them with life; Turn to Jesus for help and guidance on daily issues they are dealing with	Relationship with Christ is most important one for them; They are fully surrendered
Transition—five most influential catalysts	“Belief in salvation by grace” “Belief in	“Believing in a personal God” “Praying to seek guidance	“Giving away their lives” “Deciding	NA

Stage	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
	the Trinity” “Serving the church” “Praying for guidance frequently” “Reflecting frequently on the meaning of Scripture”	daily” “Reflecting on Scripture frequently” “Having six or more meaningful spiritual conversations with non-Christians in a year”	that Christ is first” “Embracing an identity in Christ” “Believing in the authority of the Bible” “Reflecting on Scripture daily”	

The empiricism of this study is its greatest strength. The confirmation of the stages themselves by the data that was gathered is good validation. Furthermore, the replication of the findings among more than a thousand churches and over 250,000 surveys adds to its credibility. Its main weakness is that quantitative studies can only ask closed-ended questions. There may be more variables out there that are quite significant but were not measured. Another limitation is that it studied only church attendees. There is a segment of the population who are not yet Exploring Christ—such as certain contingents of the “religious noes”, those not identifying with any religious preference, who have become a growing segment of the population (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 122-123). Presumably all those who move to the Exploring Christ stage came from that prior stage. This prior stage is not included in this continuum. These limitations of the sample and the variables studied are inherent in quantitative work, and the hope is that the historical model inferred from the Wesleyan

movement, and how well it aligns with the findings of *Reveal*, make it more relevant.

Traditional Catholic

Traditional Catholic mysticism describes a three-stage model, with stages of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. During Purgation, the individual responds to God's invitation. This stage is focused on growth in holiness, and on dealing with anything that gets in the way of the true self (McColman 2010, 153). This stage sees more effort to modify behaviors and attitudes that keep the true self from its full expression. The second stage is Illumination, where there is greater growth in holiness and more awareness of God. In this stage, the individual will be learning to "live in proper relationship with the natural, physical world and those who live in it" (McColman 2010, 168). The third stage is Union, where one reaches a level of purity of contemplation. In this final stage, the individual experiences a "participation in the divine nature (II Peter 1:4)" (McColman 2010, 168).

A helpful note here is that this model assumes pre-existing faith in an individual who is already familiar with and grounded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Therefore, there is no accounting for a period that encompasses pre-Christian or unchurched experience. In modern Catholicism, this would be equivalent to starting with a Catholic who has already received instruction in the Roman Catholic Catechism and has been through the sacrament of confirmation.

This model, therefore, does not explicitly call for a period of evangelization, faith exploration, early discipleship or catechism. This is not to say, of course, that evangelization or discipleship for new converts is not offered in the Roman Catholic Church. It is most commonly found in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) as well as a number of renewal programs such as Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish, Antioch Weekend, and others.

The weakness of this model is that it seems to be based on a life of monasticism. It is hard to know to what extent its description of the spiritual life is intended to apply to the layperson. Its strengths lie in its historicity, since Pseudo-Dionysius is believed to have lived in the late fifth or early sixth century CE. This model that is attributed to him has even earlier roots that, as mentioned above, precede him. A further limitation however lies in that very historicity. Many of the same challenges exist with reading histories of Christian mystics, where the context of their lives is so far removed from our own, that it makes it difficult at times to translate their insights into modern application.

Henri Nouwen

A more contemporary Catholic model is offered by Henri Nouwen. In his book *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* he describes seven movements of spiritual growth, although he acknowledges that there are more than just these seven (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 68-71 of 2649). Nouwen divides the movements he has chosen into three categories with two to three movements each. The movements within each category are not sequential

and can follow any order. The categories and the movements within them are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Henri Nouwen’s model (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 350, 353, 552, 797, 800, 1084, 1349, 1546, 1549, and 1747 of 2649)

Early movements	Midlife movements	Mature movements
opaqueness to transparency	sorrow to joy	exclusion to inclusion
illusion to prayer	resentment to gratitude	denying to befriending death
	fear to love	

The first movement, from opaqueness to transparency, is about beginning to see life differently through the practice of prayer and meditation. In this movement Nouwen sees the process beginning by emptying ourselves of our preconceived notions and letting go of confining God to our limited experiences (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 382-386 of 2649). Through the practice of prayer and meditation, Nouwen observes, we come to see life differently. We start seeing things for what they really are, and we value relationships much more.

In his description of the second movement, from illusion to prayer, Nouwen overlaps the first movement, where prayer is the means and not the end. In the second movement, prayer is an end in itself. Nouwen insists on the need to intentionally create space for God—that this is the essence of prayer (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 578-579 of 2649). He believes that it is in prayer that we learn that we are not the sum total of our achievements and that this makes it possible to “waste” time with God in prayer (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 593-594 of 2649).

The second broad category of movements that Nouwen turns to is midlife. In that period, he describes three movements. In the transition from sorrow to joy, he highlights the importance of grieving our losses. Without doing so there is danger of becoming bitter (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 872-873 of 2649). He explains that true healing cannot begin until we face our losses and embrace what they tell us about our brokenness, lack of control, and dependence on God (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 873-878 of 2649). In describing this movement Nouwen combines psychological insight with theological understanding. Psychology identifies the need for grieving losses explicitly and finding healing by doing so. Correspondingly, New Testament theology presents the concept of death leading to resurrection. It is in the midst of our tears and our grief that new hope is born; it is where joy is born. Nouwen describes it as a dance between grief and joy, where the first step is to mourn and grieve the losses. The second step is both theological and social: connecting our suffering with the suffering of the world (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 901-903 of 2649) and with God's story of salvation (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 926-928 of 2649). This results in new life and renewed joy.

The second movement in the category of midlife is from resentment to gratitude. Nouwen describes resentment as complaints and angry feelings that are suppressed and turn cold, with negative consequences for community life and for our sense of joy. The antidote to resentment is confessing our resentments in a loving and supportive community (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1202-1203 of 2649). References to such a community are as ecclesiological as Nouwen gets

with this model. The church provides a framework for community that brings healing and wholeness, while in the same breath it brings challenge and spurs us to grow. In that community, as we extend forgiveness and affirmation to others, we begin to see that our lives are not to be defended but shared in gratitude (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1205-1208 of 2649).

The last movement in this category is from fear to love. Nouwen identifies that much of our motivation comes from fear (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1376-1377 of 2649). He highlights God's invitation for us to move from the house of fear to God's house of love (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1431-1433 of 2649). The way of that transition is once again in prayer (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1444 of 2649). We can let go of fear when we know that we are surrounded by God's love regardless of circumstances (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1450-1451 of 2649). According to Nouwen, this offers not only spiritual wholeness but also psychological healing for anxiety and depression.

The third category that Nouwen identifies is that of mature movements. The first movement in this category is from exclusion to inclusion. This movement is marked by a radical hospitality, spiritual intimacy, and communion in Christ (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1574-1575 of 2649). Nouwen describes how we need to be poor so that God can dwell with us (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1604-1605 of 2649).

Being in community with the poor in body and mind—in his case at L'Arche, a community of care for the physically and mentally handicapped—changed Nouwen's understanding of community significantly. It changed who he

saw as believing and not believing and who he saw as wise or unwise. It also challenged his traditional understandings of “who was in and who was out” (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1600-1602 of 2649). His view of his place within community changed as well. He no longer felt the need to distinguish himself. He came to understand that the call of God was not for us to be different but to identify with others and be one with them (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1626-1628 of 2649).

The final movement in this model is the movement from denying to befriending death. This movement needs to begin well before one is facing death, because at the moment of facing it, all conscious and unconscious energy is directed to the struggle to survive (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1778-1780 of 2649). This is a psychological and social observation that has direct implication for our spiritual response. The journey of befriending death involves claiming our being beloved and becoming a child again as we are able to let go of fear (Nouwen et al. 2010, location 1905 of 2649). In this movement there is a need to forgive and be forgiven (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1823-1827 of 2649) so that one can feel free to let go. This last movement requires a radical trust in God and in his love for us (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 1943-1945 of 2649).

Nouwen concludes his model by describing how the inward and outward journeys are related. They each give strength to the other and are not to be separated (Nouwen et al. 2010, location 2017 of 2649). They do, however, require different things: “The journey inward calls for the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, meditation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of our

heart. The journey outward in community and mission calls for the disciplines of care, compassion, witness, outreach, healing, accountability, and attentiveness to the movement of other people's hearts" (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 2014-2017 of 2649).

This model has many advantages, especially around its openness. This openness is manifested in two dimensions. First, it is open to the possibility of other movements: Nouwen acknowledges that there may well be more of them that he has not written about. Second, it is open because the movements are horizontal and not vertical, in that one does not lead to the other. One gets the sense that even the groupings in early, mid, and late periods are not intended to be hard categories.

On the other hand, this categorization that is tied to the human lifespan is overly general, and does not seem to take into account later-in-life conversion experiences, for example. This brings me to the main weaknesses of this model, in that it lacks an evangelization and basic discipleship phase. An actual example of this is described by Nouwen in his book *Life of the Beloved* (Nouwen 1996), where he attempts to respond to a request from a secular journalist friend who had asked him to write something that he and his friends could connect with. Nouwen does this by describing what it means to be beloved of God. The echoes of the early movements of Nouwen's model can be discerned as he tries to draw his friend into knowing what it means to be beloved, specifically suggesting that he spend time in silent prayer (Nouwen 1996, 62-63). Nouwen describes at the end of this book how this approach did not work. At the end of the period of time

spent with Nouwen, the journalist felt that more basic questions needed to be addressed, Nouwen quotes him: “Long before you start speaking about being the Beloved and becoming the Beloved, you have to respond to some very fundamental questions such as: Who is God? Who am I? Why am I here? How can I give my life meaning? How do I get faith?” (Nouwen 1996, 115-116).

John Wesley

John Wesley (1703–1791) did not put forward an explicit model of spiritual growth and development. For Wesley, theology came from Scripture, reason, tradition, and his experience. His desire was for those he led to know God’s transforming power (Heitzenrater 2013, locations 6097-6102 of 7266). There was a clear need for “conversion” and “new birth, as well as the pardon and forgiveness of sins” (McGrath Reader 2011, 387-388). A believer had assurance because of the work of Christ, but Wesley still emphasized that our love for God and for humanity drives a need for growth in holiness (McGrath Christian Theology 2011, 340). His movement, the Methodists, was known for a very “methodical” approach to this growth in holiness. This was especially seen in the organization of the movement. It is from Wesley’s organizational model that a model of spiritual development can be inferred, and that can be instructive for the purposes of this paper.

When someone wanted to join the Methodists, they were invited to be part of a “Trial Band.” Such a band was composed of those who had not yet demonstrated a commitment to Christ. The theological principle used to

characterize the experience of those individuals was that of preventient grace—grace accorded an individual in drawing them to faith. These groups would last about four to six months. The Trial Band implies a stage of spiritual development that includes evangelization and conversion (Stafford, 2003).

When a person had demonstrated appropriate commitment, she or he would then join a “United Society” or “Class.” These class meetings developed out of financial need rather than pastoral or formational ones. In order to organize fundraising for the movement, leaders were selected to be responsible for overseeing the financial donations from up to twelve members each. As they called on members regularly, they began to encourage and provide pastoral care to individuals who were not living up to the rules Wesley had set (Watson, 2008). These groups were focused on a theology of convincing grace, a grace given to the individual to convince them of the depth of their need for Christ in their life. The grounding Scripture is from Philippians 2:12, which says, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” This type of group would meet for about two years. The inferred stage of spiritual development for the membership of this group would be a stage of deepening commitment to Christ and of basic exposure to instruction on how to follow him.

The next type of group that a Methodist would join is a “Band.” These Bands would focus on a theology of growth in discipleship and on how to live as a disciple. They would be characterized by a high level of confidentiality and closeness. Bands would not have an expectation that one would “graduate” at some point; membership would be ongoing. The main characteristic here would

be that of a growing commitment; once basic discipleship had been established, the life habits of a Christian disciple would be developed in this stage. The bands were for loving and mutual confession of sin (Stafford, 2003). Band meetings developed out of a desire to have closer community and the ability to discuss sins more openly. The verse that captured their mission statement was James 5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” Offshoots of the Band meeting were specialized bands for backsliders or for those more passionate for “Christian perfection” (Watson, 2008).

Although the Band meetings did not have an expectation of graduation, some members would get to a place where they wanted to move forward to an even more committed group; these would join a “Select Band.” The Select Band would be composed of individuals who had reached the equivalent of a spiritual adulthood, where they were giving themselves fully to God. The spiritual stage that the people in this group would fit into would be one where individuals are surrendered fully to God and want nothing more than to give themselves to him (Stafford, 2003).

This basic weakness of this model is that it is hypothesized from the way the movement was organized. There may have been logistical or other non-religious reasons to organize it in this way, such as the one already discussed about fundraising. Other reasons may have to do with desires for a particular type of group meeting that were driven by a yearning for like-minded community rather than spiritual growth. The second weakness is that the questions the group

Table 3. John Wesley's model (Stafford, 2003)

	Trial Band	United Society and Class meeting	Band meeting	Select Band
Type of attendance	Seekers	New believers	All born again	Desire with all one's heart to receive sanctifying grace
Number	4 to 6 people	12 to 36 people	4 to 8 people	4 to 8 people
Duration	2 to 3 months	~ 2 years	Ongoing	Ongoing
Theology	Prevenient grace (grace before belief—sincerity in wanting God)	Convincing grace (convinced you want and need Jesus Christ in your life)	Questions of, How do I grow in grace? How do I live as a disciple? High confidentiality	Understood to have given all of yourself at a different level—spiritual adulthood
Focus		Mind	Will	Heart
Scripture inspiration		Philippians 2:12: “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”	James 5:16: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”	
Gender mix		Mixed gender	Same gender and marital status	Mixed gender

members were expected to answer, were quite invasive, and would be seen as highly intrusive and legalistic in a modern context. Where this model is quite

impressive, however, is how predictive it is of the *Reveal* study three centuries later.

The Spiritual Continuum that came from Reveal is descriptive of the congregation in which it was initially studied. Various practices were identified in that study as helping individuals in the various stages. Four areas of practices will now be described for their relevance to the Spiritual Continuum, and how they might enhance it differently at each stage. Some were findings of the study itself, and others are from my own background. The four areas are personal spiritual practices, mentoring, dealing with suffering, and small groups.

Personal Spiritual Practices, Mentoring, Suffering, and Small Groups

The personal spiritual practices of interest here are personal prayer and reading of Scripture and other Christian spiritual material. Scriptural examples of prayer are present in sixty-two of the sixty-six books of the Bible (Constable 1995, 15), and some books give particular attention to prayer, such as Genesis, Numbers, Judges, Matthew, Luke, Acts, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, James, and 1 Peter, with the book of Psalms holding a special place as an entire book of prayer (Constable 1995, 16). Jesus himself was clear on the importance of prayer, as his actions indicated that he believed prayer made a difference. Jesus prayed and encouraged us to do so as well (Matthew 6:6). Phil Yancey, in his book *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Yancey 2006), says: “the Son of God, who had spoken worlds into being and sustains all that exists, felt a compelling need to pray. He prayed as if it

made a difference, as if the time he devoted to prayer mattered every bit as much as the time he devoted to caring for people” (Yancey 2006, 79).

One example of scriptural support for reading the Bible can be found in Psalm 119. As mentioned in my spiritual autobiography, for 176 verses the Word of God and his statutes are extolled. A second instance is that the Word of God is described as spiritual food (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4), the implication being that without it we cannot live spiritually. A third example is that Jesus himself knew the Scriptures well and applied them not only in teaching, but also in keeping himself from temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11).

The scriptural support for mentoring is extensive. Consider Eli and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, Moses and Joshua, Barnabas and Paul, and Paul and Timothy as examples (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 17). This fits with Christianity’s incarnational nature. The Holy Spirit is not only our teacher, he also teaches others through us and *vice versa*.

Scripture has much to say about walking with God in suffering. Timothy Keller says that he “came to see that the reality of suffering was one of [the Bible’s] main themes” (Keller 2013, 136 of 5803). The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are almost completely focused on the topic. Hebrews and 1 Peter are also centered on helping people deal with suffering, and “towering over all, the central figure of the whole of Scripture, Jesus Christ, is a man of sorrows” (Keller 2013, 144 of 5803). There can be no complete view of Christian spiritual formation without recognition of the cross.

Finally, a very good argument for the formational nature of small groups from the Scriptures is Jesus' intensive three-year small group experience with his disciples. It was of course much more than a small group, as they shared regular life together continually, not just once a week. Nonetheless it establishes at the very least for us a model of how a leader can invest in the lives of a small group of individuals.

Comparing the Models

Having summarized the four models, and discussed the Scriptural support for personal prayer, mentoring, dealing with suffering, and small groups, I will now consider a set of questions designed to compare the Spiritual Continuum to the other three models, and then describe how these four practices would fit in each stage and what would help individuals to transition from one stage to the next. The questions will be:

1. To what extent do the stages in one model correspond to the stages in the others?
2. Where they do correspond; what similarities and differences do they have to each other?
3. What can be inferred from the similarities?
4. How can they further develop the Spiritual Continuum?
5. What can be added from my own experience?

From the answers to these questions and integration of the four sets of practices, the Enhanced Spiritual Continuum will be developed, with a special emphasis on what it takes to transition from one stage of the model to the next.

Stage 1: Exploring Christ

Wesley's model and the Spiritual Continuum both have a clear starting point for the faith journey. The Catholic models do not have one because they already assume a catechized individual. This difference between the two sets of models reflects the priority given to adult conversion or renewal I have learned to value in the evangelical world. Wesley's Trial Band and *Reveal*'s Exploring Christ stage give adults exposure to a belief system and give them a choice to believe or not. In my own journey, this period was compressed into the intense four-day Christmas conference I attended, where I understood the gospel differently, had my questions answered, and made my initial commitment. There is definitely no doubt in my mind that my childhood exposure to faith traditions contributed to my openness and trust of this experience at the conference, and it likely made the shortness of the period possible.

A person can find faith in a number of different contexts, but conversion alone is not sufficient. As Dallas Willard said, we were called to focus on making disciples, not just converts (Willard 1998, 304-305). Some of the more successful evangelistic models I have worked have been successful largely because they occur in a setting that allows for ongoing discipleship.

The journey from unbelief to belief, or from lack of commitment to commitment, is often seen, especially in evangelical contexts, as a one-time event. Although that is definitely the case for many, including the Apostle Paul himself, it is not the case for everyone. Different traditions view this transition through a variety of lenses—from critical individual experiences with a clearly identified

event with its own unique time and space for each person, to more standardized age-based programs and classes that are not as salient in the life of the faithful as other aspects of the Christian life, as seen in the Catholic models.

One resource that has been used in recent years in many different traditions for people in this stage is the Alpha course. The explanation given by Nicky Gumbel in that course is that although for some people coming to faith is a clearly identified moment, for others it is not. For the latter group it is like taking the train from Paris to Berlin. At some point you've crossed the border, but you don't know exactly when and where. Another of Gumbel's training points for future Alpha leaders is that he speaks of evangelization as opposed to evangelism because it is a process. He uses the Scripture most often referred to by proponents of a clearly defined event of conversion, John 3:3, which points to a new birth. Gumbel says that even a new human birth is something that is seen to be developing over a nine-month period. Similarly, we can look at new birth into the Kingdom of God as a process that can and does take some time.

In the Alpha course, this process is nurtured by prayer for the individual, inclusion in loving Christian community, and allowing them space to process their own thoughts on the essential topics of the Christian faith. These topics are outlined below (Gumbel 1996, 21-44):

1. Who is Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus die?
3. How can we have faith?
4. Why and how do I pray?

5. Why and how should I read the Bible?
6. How does God guide us?
7. How can I resist evil?
8. Why and how should I tell others?
9. Does God heal today?
10. What about the church?
11. Who is the Holy Spirit?
12. What does the Holy Spirit do?
13. How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?
14. How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

The Alpha program, which I had the privilege to facilitate and train others in, is one of many that are used by different traditions in this stage. The Catholic models, as mentioned above do not include this stage, but Roman Catholics do have equivalent renewal programs. They often take the form of a weekend retreat followed by subsequent weekly meetings. Some examples of these programs are: Christ Renews His Parish, The Antioch Weekend, and Cursillo.

A useful tool that is heavily used with university students in this stage is the wheel illustration created by the Navigators. In this illustration, the centrality of Christ is depicted by his presence in the center of the wheel. Four spokes extend from the center of the wheel to the rim. The first spoke is prayer, the second is fellowship, the third is the Word, and the fourth is witnessing. These help to support the outer rim, which is the Christian life in action. This wheel illustration has been adopted by other groups as well.

Another issue I have found to be of importance at this stage is the differentiation between faith and feelings. Historically, a number of evangelical formation traditions have been suspicious of feelings and have emphasized intellect, action, and commitment instead. These are indeed good emphases at this stage, and the difference between faith and feeling is very helpful to delineate. Otherwise a new believer is easily deceived when the feelings of euphoria they experience during an initial spiritual high associated with a conversion experience, are not sustained after it dissipates, and they risk losing their newfound faith. However, it is also dangerous to ignore the experience of feelings altogether. This tension needs to be addressed with some level of integration at some point. However, the role of feelings needs to be de-emphasized in this stage and reintroduced at a later date. In some ways, this is similar to instructing a child not to give in to every whim or feeling but to recognize the need for superseding priorities. At a later date, they are then taught to verbalize and express their feelings and pay attention to them in appropriate ways.

Another topic in this stage for many is how to handle doubt. It is helpful to establish an ethic of pressing into doubts and seeking answers and to provide basic guidance of how to do so. Doubts need to be seen as an opportunity for growth, not as a threat to it. This was a gift to me in InterVarsity, where I was encouraged to pursue my doubts. Had I just been told to believe and not doubt, I am not sure I would be writing this today. One anchoring Scripture is Jesus's encouragement for us to "ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

The Spiritual Continuum gives some additional insights into this stage.

One is that people in this stage are particularly interested in whether there was a moment when things “clicked” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 35). My personal observation is that people want to hear about evidence of how this is real. They look for evidence of personal experience more than apologetics. They are eager for stories of faith that they perceive as genuine. This seems to be a catalyst to increasing their faith.

Personal Spiritual Practices in Stage 1

Personal spiritual practices are probably the most challenging aspect of this stage for the unchurched. They simply have no frame of reference for reading the Bible or for prayer. Reading the Bible is easier to tackle for this group due to the blessing of modern-day translations and paraphrases. *The Message* is particularly helpful for those who have had no exposure to the Bible. For others who have had more exposure, it is useful to make them aware of modern-day translations with explanatory sidebars so they are not under the impression that the Bible is a daunting, unfamiliar text written in Elizabethan English.

Prayer can be a more difficult topic to introduce. My experience is that individuals in this group fall into two categories: those who have a running dialogue with God, and those who can’t fathom the thought of prayer and feel like they’re talking to the ceiling. For either group, instruction, modeling, and mentoring are important. It is helpful at this stage to teach simple prayers and to provide simple formats like the popular ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication).

Dyadic Relationship in Stage 1

During this stage, a supportive mentoring relationship is probably most helpful in answering an individual's questions. Since this stage is particularly dependent on what the individual's background is, a supportive mentoring relationship could be seen as a scary and threatening intrusion. On the other hand, genuine interest in a person's life, showing love and acceptance, can be exactly what the person needs.

Small Groups in Stage 1

Small groups at this stage can also be very unfamiliar and scary. One anecdote that Nicky Gumbel tells is about a man who came to Alpha but did not eat anything for the first few meetings because he had heard that cults put something in the food to make visitors more suggestable, and it took him a while to begin to trust the hosts and eat their food. Although most people don't have that kind of extreme distrust, they do have some level of apprehension at this stage. Small groups may therefore be too much of a step forward at this point for an individual. On the other hand, some of the most effective movement through this stage happens in small groups, such as those in the Alpha structure. If a person can feel comfortable coming to a group where they can be exposed to the Bible, have a place to discuss their thoughts and questions, see how prayer is done, and form relationships with people of faith, then that is ideal. But if the person is not ready, they may need to wait a while.

Learning to Respond to Suffering

When I ran the Alpha course, which is specifically designed for this stage, I could almost guarantee that sometime in the first three weeks, and usually more than once, the issue of why a loving God allows suffering would come up. I learned through this process that theodicy is not the answer. People investigating faith were usually dealing with the emotional aspect of the question rather than the intellectual one. Providing an accepting and safe space where they could talk through those issues was usually the most helpful way to transcend the issue and not let it become an insurmountable roadblock. This type of supportive environment that acknowledges the personal difficulty of the question can be provided in a small group or in a dyadic relationship.

Transition to Next Stage

According to the Spiritual Continuum, the transition from this stage to the next requires the establishment of basic belief structures of historical orthodox Christianity. The study also observed that the beginnings of practices of prayer for guidance a few times a week, as well as reflecting on Scripture and applying it to their daily lives, are catalytic for this transition (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 131). This aligns well qualitatively with the need for initial assent and commitment to the teachings of Christ that Wesley's Trial Band required before entrance to the next level Society or Class meeting was allowed. By today's standards, the commitments of the Wesleyans were exceptionally high. The concept, however, is the same.

Stage 2: Growing in Christ

The next stage in the Spiritual Continuum is that of Growing in Christ, where individuals begin to develop their relationships with Christ. In this stage, they are learning how to engage in daily personal spiritual practices, such as prayer and Scripture reading and reflection. This stage is, therefore, marked by the internalizing of theological truths, a commitment to Christ, and the development of daily personal spiritual practices. This is not a clear-cut transition from the previous stage, as those characteristics could have been observed there; as we will see with the other stages, none of the changes are absolute. These differences between the stages, although possibly quantifiable as some of the studies suggest, are more subjective and qualitatively describable. Overlap between the stages is, therefore, expected. In this case, the previous stage could have seen the development and internalization of theological truths, as well as commitment to Christ and personal spiritual practices, but it is in stage two that they are most salient in their emergence. In my experience, this occurred during the two years with InterVarsity that immediately followed the Christmas conference, where I went through the InterVarsity curriculum for basic discipleship and was mentored by a student leader, who would later become one of my pastors.

An insight that deserves additional attention is that although “churches are quite clear about defining Christianity as the practice of believing in and following Jesus … this very basic premise is not being effectively communicated” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 36). Somewhere along the line, as someone

crosses over the threshold of commitment to Jesus, they need to receive and internalize this message, albeit in a limited fashion at this stage for most.

This is very similar to the topics that Wesley's second stage, the United Society and Class Meetings, focused on. Their emphasis on internalizing the message of grace and getting basic instruction on how to follow Jesus corresponds with the Growing in Christ stage, at least in emphasis. Both the Spiritual Continuum and Wesley's organizational model see a period, after making an initial decision to follow Christ, where a basic level of discipleship is established, where the foundational elements of the faith are internalized and their practice is taught.

In both Catholic models discussed here, a catechized person would not have needed the previous stage of *Reveal*'s and Wesley's models, and in the second stage of either model they don't need the basic instruction either. There is a parallel, however, in the shift that happens in that in both models there is a deeper turning towards God. For Nouwen this happens through prayer and meditation, but in the traditional Catholic model it happens through a focus on getting rid of the more obvious sin in life. The emphasis in Nouwen's model for his early movements on turning to prayer does align with the beginnings of those practices in *Reveal*'s and Wesley's models. The emphasis on dealing with sin in the Purgation stage of the traditional Catholic model does not align with the other models. It is more evident in the next stage of the other models.

During this time of Growing in Christ, it is helpful to communicate clearly that in all things we should seek God first, and that no matter what we are dealing

with, Matthew 6:33 (“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”) is relevant. A foundational concept at this stage is the need to repeatedly put this verse into practice. One fruitful result of doing so is that new believers start to see God’s faithfulness in response. This in turn builds their faith, which at this point is at a critical developmental stage. A related dynamic in this second stage is that of testing. It is quite common for new believers to experience first a period of euphoria, followed by a time of difficulty in which their faith is tested. New believers at this stage are quite vulnerable as they have not experienced anything like this testing before. It is of value for the believer here to have appropriate support, teaching, and mentoring to normalize those feelings and to create a foundational understanding around how suffering and pruning (John 15:2) are part of a journey of following God. Providing encouragement and guidance on how to respond to difficulty is critical.

Personal Spiritual Practices in Stage 2

The Spiritual Continuum shows us that in this stage, individuals become more comfortable with spiritual practices (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 61). In fact, it shows that personal spiritual practices increase by a factor of two or more over the previous stage (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 57). Learning how to prioritize meeting with God over meeting our own needs becomes an influential paradigm to internalize (Carlson and Lueken 2011, 916 of 2668).

To that end, learning additional verbal prayer practices becomes meaningful. One possibility is to introduce them to the patterns of prayer in the Psalms, which include how to express honestly one’s feelings and thoughts to

God and how to give thanks and praise in good times and bad. Another option is deeper teaching around the patterns of prayer found in the prayer Jesus taught us (Matthew 6:9-13). Many may already be familiar with that prayer as a rote recitation. They can be challenged to look at it from a personal or communal perspective and asked to categorize their prayers under each of the petitions and structure their prayer time accordingly.

Inductive Bible reading can be taught at this stage, as well as the use of Bible study guides. It is good at this point to establish fluency in the Bible narrative as a whole. The Spiritual Continuum shows that at this stage there is an overall acceptance of Christian core beliefs (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 61). This can result from foundational teaching that can come from Sunday services or small groups. Such teaching works well at this stage because this demographic has the highest participation in both services and small groups, which indicates that they indeed are looking to the church to fulfill that purpose in their spiritual life (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 53).

Dyadic Relationship in Stage 2

There are three one-on-one relationship contexts that provide great benefit at this stage. The first is a continuation of a discipling relationship if one has already started. If not, starting one now would be highly beneficial. Second, mentoring in getting started in ministry is also helpful at this stage because this group is the most active in church service (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 53). A third possibility is having a prayer partner, someone to check in with once a week so the two can pray for each other. This can be done over the phone or in person

and can provide several benefits, including encouragement in prayer, deepening community, and additional modeling by the more experienced partner.

Small Groups in Stage 2

As has already been mentioned, this group is the most active in small groups (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 53). Their involvement provides an opportunity to make sure they get the benefit of instruction, modeling, and community in a small group setting. This can be the place where they receive foundational theology and the essentials of the Christian Biblical narrative. In some traditions, adult Sunday School is more prevalent than small groups, in which case the same aims can be achieved through that medium.

Learning to Respond to Suffering

During this stage, a number of lifestyle changes will likely need to be made. Whether it is subtle, such as a pattern of self-centeredness, or obvious, such as a promiscuous lifestyle, changes will need to be made in the areas that are clearly not in obedience to the loving call of Christ. Making these changes will likely be costly to the individual, and this is a good time to provide encouragement as they identify these areas and respond to them.

Transition to Next Stage

The variables involved in the transition to the next stage, as observed in the Spiritual Continuum, include the shift in spiritual practices of prayer seeking guidance and reflection on Scripture from a few times a week to daily. People moving to stage three should also now have a firm belief in God's activity in their

life. In addition, meaningful spiritual conversations occur on a regular basis, and tithing of ten percent or more to the church is prevalent (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 147).

Stage 3: Close to Christ

The next stage in the Spiritual Continuum is the Close to Christ segment. It is a stage where the basics of faith have been previously covered and it is a time of a deepening relationship with God. This, it seems, is where most of my walk with God since my early twenties has been, and probably where it continues to be, where I am continuously challenged to trust him more.

In the Spiritual Continuum, this segment is characterized by a dependence on God for help daily and a looking to him for guidance on a regular basis. In the traditional Catholic model, this is found in the Illumination stage, where the individual is invited to a deeper and ongoing awareness of God. In the Spiritual Continuum, it is also the stage where confession of sin on a regular basis in prayer is first noted, as well as an increase in going public with their faith and a noticeable increase in tithing. The Spiritual Continuum also makes the following additional observations for those in this segment (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 78):

- Making their relationship with Jesus part of their everyday lives
- Confident in God's presence and power
- Connecting daily with God through personal spiritual practices
- Beginning to show signs of spiritual transformation

In Wesley's movement, after the Class meetings came the Band meetings. These were for those who showed a sense of desire to grow in grace and discipleship at a deeper level of commitment. For these Bands, the scriptural inspiration is from James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." This is similar to the Spiritual Continuum's noted increase in confession of sins. The difference here is between confession to God privately in that continuum and confessing sins to others in the Band meetings, which was expected in Wesley's movement. Nonetheless, dealing with sin is a desired outcome in both these models in their third stages.

Nouwen includes a confession of sins in community similar to Wesley. He places it in his midlife movements. He describes a movement from resentment to gratitude, which comes from confessing our resentments in a loving community. This is not the same as in the traditional Catholic model, where confession is emphasized in the first stage, Purgation, and it is confession mediated through a priest.

In the Spiritual Continuum, we see the change from a focus on self to a focus on Christ. This could very loosely be seen as corresponding to Nouwen's movement from fear to love. We do not see any parallel, however, for Nouwen's movement from sorrow to joy in the Spiritual Continuum. In the Spiritual Continuum, we also see that the result of the change in focus from self to Christ is an increase in levels of service (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 76) and evangelism. The previous segment had some of the highest levels of involvement in church activities and service. In my spiritual autobiography, I have noted that

there was a time when I learned I could not do everything, and I learned the distinction between driven-ness and calling. The need to learn how to be led into ministry and service via a discernment process is a worthwhile lesson that would be appropriate here. It is also my observation that a corollary development in this stage is to learn to see all of one's work as ministry, to work out of a sense of faithfulness to Jesus as our Master instead of just for a paycheck.

The Spiritual Continuum also shows that daily spiritual practices increase significantly at this stage (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 71). In particular, the increases are most noteworthy in the prayers for daily guidance and in the confession of sins (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 70). This indicates a growing awareness of one's brokenness and need for God.

A by-product of increased commitment to daily practices is the temptation to legalism. An extended period of life-giving spiritual practices can lead to faith in the practices themselves rather than the God who gives grace through them. As Dallas Willard put it: "The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God" (Willard, 2001). An example of legalism might be someone whose daily prayer time becomes a way to earn God's favor in order to have a good relationship with him. A similar attitude can come from devotion to ministry when it becomes a way to be in good standing with God. Daily prayer time and devotion to ministry are activities that can come from an attitude of passion fueled by grace or from an attitude of legalism. The actions

themselves, however, are not opposed to grace. A healthy resolution of that tension needs to happen at this stage.

The question of tithing is appropriate to bring up at this stage as well.

Although different traditions treat this sensitive subject with varying degrees of prescription, the whole question of money needs to be addressed. In the Spiritual Continuum, the practice of tithing increases dramatically in the Close to Christ segment. Consumerist views of unbridled consumption, debt, and hedonism are not Kingdom values, and this period is an appropriate time to introduce these topics as well.

Deepening spiritual friendships are important here as well, as they allow for the kind of safe community where sins can be confessed and resentments healed. This type of community also brings with it the need to develop healthy conflict resolution skills that can deepen relationships instead of fracturing them when tensions develop.

A theology of suffering is something that has to become personal and internalized, and it is likely to build momentum in this stage. The various aspects of suffering described in the Scriptures are internalized differently across individuals. Nonetheless, there is a common basic theme that following Jesus involves a cross, a death to self, and a receiving of new life. It involves learning obedience by submitting to whatever suffering our path of following Jesus subjects us to, just as he did (Philippians 2). It also involves accepting persecution and that the path we follow is not the same as this world's. Finally, it involves acceptance of suffering in faith that God is using it to make us more like Jesus. In

my own journey, much of the foundation for this learning was laid in this stage, however, this kind of fully surrendered acceptance of suffering and continuously having peace filled hope and faith in the midst of it continues to elude me. This is part of the reason I do not feel I am able to stay in the next stage on a regular basis.

Personal Spiritual Practices in Stage 3

With the increased desire for spiritual practices comes a need to develop further fluency in different types of practices. Different forms of journaling can be introduced. Various methods of listening prayer can be taught. At this stage there may be enough Bible literacy that, in addition to Scripture, reading other Christian materials can be highly encouraged. This reading can help people to better contextualize scriptural truth into everyday life in the twenty-first century. The value of reading the Bible formationally rather than informationally can be introduced through various practices such as *lectio divina* or Luther's garland of prayer. Finally, solitude is a good practice to introduce at this stage. It is possible that by this stage the individual is experienced with solitude and experiences joy in the practice, and that he or she wants more. In that case, it may be time to introduce silent individual prayer retreats.

Dyadic Relationship in Stage 3

The greater awareness of one's brokenness that often accompanies this period opens up the possibility for counseling. In addition, the increased desire for

God's guidance, as evidenced in the Spiritual Continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 69), can lead to receiving spiritual direction. It is good to normalize, therefore, the need for both of these disciplines and how they can be agents of grace and spiritual transformation for the Holy Spirit to use in the life of the believer.

Small Groups in Stage 3

Groups can start to lose their appeal to individuals in this stage. One reason could be that the level of challenge provided there is more geared to the majority of attendees, and according to the Spiritual Continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 51) attendance peaks in stage two. Another reason is that by this time people have been exposed to a range of small groups, some better than others, and they become more discriminating.

One benefit of this is that people in this stage may be at a place where they can learn to lead a small group. In fact, it is appropriate at this stage to encourage people to get general Christian leadership training, whether it applies in small groups or not. Identification of spiritual gifts, refining a sense of calling, and establishing Kingdom stewardship in various aspects of life can then be used to introduce the concept of a Rule of Life and to help people develop intentionality in all the spheres of their lives.

Learning to Respond to Suffering

During this stage, there are a number of things that an individual may need to learn. The first is that suffering may be either directly coming from God or

intentionally allowed by God for our benefit. Responding by asking that it be removed is acceptable and modeled for us by Jesus and the Apostle Paul as they each asked three times for their suffering to be taken away. There comes a point of discernment, however, when accepting and embracing our suffering is God's path, as both Paul's and Jesus' models attest. Learning to give thanks in submission to God in difficulty then becomes life-giving and faith building. A lesson that begins at this stage and prepares the way for the next stage is the concept of laying down our lives for the sake of Christ. The shift from our happiness as our goal to faithfulness to Christ as our chief aim creates a very different perception of and response to suffering, which ultimately bears fruit in stage 4.

Transition to Next Stage

The transition from this stage to the next is one of “inner heart transformation” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 162). There is a change from a reserved spirituality to one that is lived with abandon. Putting Christ first and finding identity in him help to catalyze the move to the next stage. Belief in the authority of the Bible and increasing daily spiritual practices are secondary catalysts in comparison to the heart transformation that is observed (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 162). The underlying theme of this transformation emphasizes the desire to give away one’s life, such as in intentional ministry that is driven by a new level of passion. This is the type of commitment that Wesley’s Select Bands looked for in their prospective members before admitting them (Stafford, 2003).

Stage 4: Christ Centered

The final segment of the Spiritual Continuum, describes Christ-Centered individuals who are fully surrendered to Christ and their relationship with him is their highest priority. A similar theme appears in Wesley's Select Bands, where the individuals are understood to have given all of themselves to Christ. This radical sense of commitment and abandon among individuals who reach this last stage appears in both models. In this stage, there is a maturity of individuals' relationships with God and an unreserved surrender to him. I wish I could say that I can identify fully with this stage. I find myself stepping in and out of it. I don't feel that I am there yet.

Nouwen's movement from fear to love is identified in the midlife movements of his model, but it appears to have a stronger correspondence in this final segment of the Spiritual Continuum. As for the next set of movements in the mature segment of Nouwen's model, from exclusion to inclusion—where his experience at L'Arche helped him to redefine his understanding of "who was in and who was out" (Nouwen 2010, locations 1600-1602 of 2649) and increased his focus on what was common between him and the rest of humanity—there is some parallel in the Spiritual Continuum with its findings of increased levels of service, but it is not explicitly stated. The final movement, from fearing to befriending death, does not have a noted parallel in the Spiritual Continuum.

In the traditional Catholic model, the final stage is termed Union. The move from Kataphatic to Apophatic spirituality may occur at this stage. Kataphatic spirituality is knowledge based (Howard 2008, 136), whereas

Apophatic spirituality rests in the “silent recognition that God is beyond” (Howard 2008, 139). Deeper surrender may lead to greater experiences of union with God. The traditional Catholic model describes contemplative practices as beginning in the Purgation stage, but the fruit of that practice, the sense of union with God, is characteristic of this stage; hence its title. The Union stage does not have clear parallels in the Wesleyan model or in the Spiritual Continuum. This is likely due to the absence of teaching regarding this ultimate desire for union with God in Protestant traditions as compared to Catholic ones, where union with God is a sought-after goal in prayer among mystics. This state of unity with God involves complete connection with him and yet maintains the person’s individuality, and it is often accompanied by a sense of bliss in the experienced love of God.

The Spiritual Continuum’s findings here are particularly noteworthy. The study that produced it shows that compared to the previous stages, it is in this one that the “value scale” needle actually moves past the midpoint (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 84). The levels of service in the church, service to the poor, tithing, and evangelism are all high compared to the other stages (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 87). Individuals have also learned to “deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow Christ” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 84). In my view, the development and internalization of a theology of suffering, of how to press in to God in the middle of difficulty and seek his face and transforming power through it and in it, is probably developed by this stage, and the fruit of it is seen in this stage in greater serenity in surrender in the midst of difficulty.

Personal Spiritual Practices in Stage 4

Prayer will likely move from verbal or listening prayer to meditation and contemplation in this stage. Even though the Catholic model shows this transition as beginning in the previous stage, my observation is that it is more likely to occur with significant frequency in this final stage of the Spiritual Continuum.

Introducing and practicing the Examen would be a good fit in this stage, as it helps to bring all of life to God in prayer, which supports the desire for following Christ with full abandon that is experienced in this stage.

Dyadic Relationship in Stage 4

Spiritual friendship is something that can be introduced at this stage. Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167 CE) speaks of its four qualities: love, affection, confidentiality, and joy (Dutton 2010, 99). Aelred sees these friendships as lifelong, which does not translate well to a highly mobile contemporary society, but it can at least be said that these friendships are intended to be deep and have a long lifespan. A key distinction of these friendships for Aelred was that both friends should be able to give and receive correction appropriately (Dutton 2010, 79).

A more focused form of this type of friendship is described by Francis DeSales (1567–1622 CE), with the centrality of the other’s relationship with God as paramount:

If your mutual exchanges deal with knowledge, your friendship is certainly very laudable; it will be even better if they deal with the moral virtues such as prudence, discretion, strength, justice [cf. Wis. 3:7-8; Prov. 8:14]; but if they pertain to charity, the love of God, Christian

perfection, then this friendship is truly precious and excellent: excellent because it comes from God, excellent because it tends toward God, excellent because its bond is God, excellent because it will endure eternally in God (De Sales, eCatholic 2000).

People at this stage are ready for this type of friendship, which will often be a valuable resource in discernment. Yet even though spiritual direction is sometimes referred to as spiritual friendship, this is not what Aelred and Francis were referring to. Therefore, spiritual direction is a different discipline, but one that will nonetheless helpful to continue or start in this stage, as the desire to be in discernment increases.

Small Groups in Stage 4

Peer groups are probably most helpful at this stage. Even so, those groups need a certain level of intentionality, as expressed by the Select Bands' hard-hitting questions. For example, the bands could choose from many questions at any given time, but the ones that they asked every time, at least as recorded in 1744, were as follows (Do You Desire to Be Told of Your Faults?, 2005):

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

Intentional questions are helpful in this type of group, but the level of intrusiveness from the Select Bands' questions needs to be carefully evaluated

and managed. Therapy process groups could potentially provide the type of closeness and challenge envisioned by the Select Bands, but it would require finding peers at that same stage and a like-minded therapist, as well as the further development of this approach. This possibility has received little attention in the field of Christian counseling or that of spiritual formation. Group spiritual direction, as envisioned by Rose Mary Dougherty in her book *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (Dougherty 1995), is a possibility that can address the needs at this level as well.

Learning to Respond to Suffering

“Holy Indifference” is a term that Ignatius used to describe a state where the individual cares only for the will of God, and is indifferent to anything else (Dirks 2013, location 2085 of 3406). Although this process of caring first about God’s will begins in stage 2, it is a lifelong process. It may begin to build momentum towards the end of stage 3 as the individual begins to embrace laying everything down for the sake of following Jesus, but it comes to more noticeable fruition in this stage: “the Christ-Centered segment … begins seeing Jesus in a radically new way. Rather than expecting Jesus to be there for the sole purpose of helping *them* with *their* lives, they respond to his call to sacrifice and lay down their lives to serve *Jesus* and advance *his* mission in the world (italics in the original)” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 93). The reality of the cross and embracing it is something that is internalized. It is at this stage that individuals “regularly face their struggles and must choose each day to follow Jesus rather than giving in to the pull of the secular world. They learn by habitual practice to

deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow Christ" (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 84).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has summarized four different types of models. It has used the Spiritual Continuum as a foundation and compared it to the other models. My personal experience has also been integrated to enhance the Spiritual Continuum in practical ways. There was a regular pattern of correspondence between the Spiritual Continuum and the way Wesley organized his movement. There were some parallels noted with Nouwen's movements, and less so for the traditional Catholic model. Recommendations were made for personal spiritual practices, small groups, and one-on-one input, and some of the continuum's observations as to the catalysts for movement from one stage to the next were shared.

The description of the stages in this Spiritual Continuum, along with the types of small groups, what may need to be learned about suffering, and which dyadic relationships and personal spiritual practices are needed at each stage, can be used in a church setting to establish ministries that support each individual's growth. If the individual's needs are not taken into consideration, spiritual formation ministries can run the hazard of attempting one-size-fits-all approaches, the risk being that not everyone will benefit. What is worse is that some will remain stuck in their journeys, possibly as described in the Stalled and Dissatisfied segments of the Spiritual Continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 169-170). These may well be the individuals for whom the type of intervention

described in the next chapter can make the most impact. In this next chapter, individuals' prayer lives are examined, with an emphasis on understanding what obstacles they are facing in moving forward and how a dyadic mentoring relationship can best assist them.

CHAPTER 4:
THE IMPACT OF ONE-ON-ONE
MENTORING IN PERSONAL PRAYER ON
SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF INDIVIDUALS AT
THE BROWN LINE VINEYARD

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-14 (ESV) that God gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to build up the body of Christ until everyone attains maturity in Christ. This project studied one approach that a church can take to help individuals grow toward that maturity in Christ. Individuals grow through a variety of experiences and Christian practices. One practice that has been empirically supported is personal spiritual practices. Those can be encouraged by a variety of ways, with personal mentoring being the approach of choice in this study. This study established the positive link between mentoring and growth in personal prayer, and confirmed the link between growth in prayer and spiritual growth in this context. It can now provide a solid foundation for churches to use in helping individuals grow spiritually.

Introduction

This field research opportunity, the response to it, along with definitions of key terms, supervision, permission, and access will now be discussed below.

Opportunity or Problem

Empirical support for the process of growth toward spiritual maturity comes from research conducted by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson at Willow Creek Community Church and then at more than 1,000 churches (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 16). Although it is never easy to ascertain and measure Christian maturity or describe the stages within that journey, they have had a measure of success in doing so. First, they used a definition of spiritual growth—"An increasing love for God and for other people" (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 29)—to develop a tool to measure where the respondents fell along a spiritual growth continuum. This is based on Matthew 22:37-39, where Jesus says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" The data for this research was gathered from over eleven thousand surveys from Willow Creek and six other churches (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 29). The researchers argued that the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors they measured were highly predictive of where the respondents would fall along the spiritual growth continuum (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 25–26). Based on that data, they identified four spiritual stages in a Spiritual Continuum: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 37). As previously described, these data and spiritual stages were supported by further research with over 250,000 surveys at more than 1,000 churches (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 18). As one might expect, the Christian practices that help individuals grow spiritually in the early

stages are different from those that help them grow in the later, more mature stages. One set of variables, however, is consistently correlated with spiritual growth regardless of which stage the person is in. Hawkins and Parkinson's results show that personal spiritual practices are consistently helpful to growth at every stage (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 117). The opportunity, then, is to find the most effective ways to help individuals grow in their personal spiritual practices to support their continued growth toward Christian maturity.

The difficulty in encouraging this type of personal commitment is that there is a lack of willingness in the pews to address issues like spiritual maturity that require a level of investment. In research conducted by the Barna organization, 81% of individuals said they had made a personal commitment to Christ that was still important in their lives, 78% strongly agreed that spirituality is important to them. Even so, only 18% said that they were totally committed to investing in their spiritual growth (Barna Group 2011). Barna's report was a quantitative one, and does not answer the reasons why this is the case. However, this project provides a possible path for addressing this tension.

Response or Innovation

There are a variety of personal spiritual practices. Two that evangelical Christians would commonly practice are Bible reading and personal prayer (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 18–19). Encouraging people to grow in those practices would be expected to help them grow spiritually as mentioned above. The way to encourage them can take many forms, but the value of mentoring in

my own life, and its unique ability to provide encouragement and instruction tailored to the individual's needs, led me to choose it as the method of encouraging this type of growth (see my spiritual autobiography in chapter two). This study then evaluated how mentoring participants in their personal prayer lives helped them improve their prayer lives and enrich their relationships with God.

Encouraging people in their personal prayer lives requires sensitivity. What is challenging in a positive way to one person can sound legalistic to another. What is a helpful framework for one person can feel like a straitjacket to another. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that can be offered. Consequently, a personalized mentoring approach to encouraging people in this area was preferred. In addition, millennials are more predisposed to one-on-one models of discipleship than other generations (Barna Group 2015, 85), and, as will be seen below, this is especially relevant in this study, since all the participants were millennials.

Mentoring provided the opportunity to meet each person's needs exactly where they were: with their individual struggles and successes, their particular life stories, and their present circumstances. This study helped to demonstrate the effectiveness of mentoring on personal prayer in a contemporary church context. It showed that brief weekly phone calls (usually less than ten minutes) were very helpful in assisting participants to re-engage in personal prayer and experience the positive impact of this spiritual practice on their relationships with God. The findings of this study are being used to establish a ministry of this type for the

Brown Line Vineyard as a central means of spiritual formation, where additional mentors will be trained and participation is open to all members of the church who are interested.

Definition of Key Terms

Mentoring: The definition of this term as used in this project is taken from Stanley and Clinton—“Mentoring is a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources” (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 12). “The person sharing is called the mentor. The person being empowered is called the mentoree. The God-given resources include wisdom, experiences, patterns, habits of obedience, and principles, as well as a host of other things” (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 33).

There are different types of mentoring that Stanley and Clinton discuss. Of those, the following were included in the role of mentor in this project: Discipler, Coach, and Teacher (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 33). In addition, the role of mentor as Spiritual Advisor is also included. This is not the same as Spiritual Direction. The functions of a Spiritual Guide, according to Stanley and Clinton, include (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 66-67):

- “Help believers assess their own development”
- “Point out areas of strength and weakness in spirituality”
- “Help believers identify needs and take initiative for change and growth”
- “Provide perspectives on how to develop growth and depth.”
- “Provide accountability for spiritual maturity.”

This is different from Barry and Connolly's definition of spiritual direction: "We define Christian spiritual direction then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship" (Barry and Connolly 1986, 8). Spiritual Advising was included in the mentoring in this study, whereas spiritual direction was not.

Other forms of mentoring described by Stanley and Clinton were also not included. One in particular deserves further clarification. They define one type of mentoring as counselor, and they provide a larger definition of the term than that of mental health counseling. They see the latter as a subset of the former. Mental health counseling was not performed and was not part of this study (Stanley and Clinton 1992, 96).

Prayer: In the *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Howard 2008) prayer is defined in a general sense as communication with God (Howard 2008, 300). This is further refined by Howard as follows: "*Interpersonal communication* involves three central elements: speaking (using verbal communication as a model), listening, and what can be called the space in between. We disclose to another. The other receives. There is silence between (italics in the original)" (Howard 2008, 300).

Personal Prayer: In the context of this study, this will mean a regularly scheduled time of prayer and reading that is done alone. Although many aspire to make personal prayer a daily practice, this is not necessarily required for the

definition used here. The participant could pray three times a week, for example. Finally, for the purpose of this study, a specific exclusion is needed for clarity: ongoing conversation with God throughout the day is not part of this study. Personal prayer is also referred to as devotional prayer in some of the interviews.

Supervision, Permission, and Access

The primary investigator in the research was accountable to the Research and Ethics Board of Tyndale Seminary and the administration and faculty of Tyndale Seminary. The Research Ethics Board approved the proposal on 9/27/2016. In the field, accountability was to the pastors of the Brown Line Vineyard church in Chicago, Illinois. Their permission was sought to conduct the research and gain access to the participants.

The primary investigator, myself, was not the pastor, counselor, or spiritual director of any of the participants. This reduced the power differential and therefore helped minimize the risks generally inherent in this type of research. I was seen as a lay leader, teacher, and mentor in the church. The role of mentor was continued into this project. The only identified risk was the possibility of participants feeling guilt for not meeting the goals they set for themselves. The risk of feelings of guilt was mitigated in three ways. First, during the initial kickoff seminar, guilt and shame were clearly discussed as undesirable motivators. Second, the individuals set their own goals. This also helped remove any bias from me as to what he thought was the best next step for the individual. Third, whenever someone brought up feelings of guilt during mentoring, I

responded with affirmation and reframing, where reframing takes what the person brings to the conversation and offers the same information back but with a different and more positive perspective, allowing them to see the reality in a new and more helpful light (Sadock and Sadock 2007, 943).

Context

I have been involved in spiritual formation and spiritual direction in multiple contexts. My current context is a church plant of the Vineyard Christian Church of Evanston. The Evanston Vineyard is located in a suburb of Chicago; approximately fifteen hundred people attend weekly. The congregation is demographically and socioeconomically diverse. The church plant is the Brown Line Vineyard, located in Chicago. Approximately seventy people call it their church home. Many attendees of the Brown Line Vineyard were members of the Evanston Vineyard prior to the inception of the Brown Line church. Vineyard churches have held a place on the theological spectrum somewhere between traditional evangelicals and charismatics. The title of one book about the Vineyard's history, called *The Quest for the Radical Middle* (Jackson 1999), is a reference to the movement's theological position on the spectrum between charismatics and evangelicals. Another book's title refers to Vineyard churches as *Empowered Evangelicals* (Nathan and Wilson 1995), which essentially says the same thing but not from a historical approach, namely that Vineyard churches are essentially evangelical, but that they do embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are more prevalent in charismatic churches.

My academic background includes a BS and MS in Biomedical Engineering from Northwestern University (1984 and 1986), an MA in Counseling from Northeastern Illinois University (2013), and a certificate in spiritual direction from North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, where I studied from 2004 to 2007. I have practiced spiritual direction continually since then. Although mentoring and spiritual direction are not the same thing, there are three elements of spiritual direction training and experience that make it an ideal preparation for mentoring others in prayer.

The first element involves listening skills, which are critical for spiritual directors (Barry and Connolly 1986, 127). These skills are highly beneficial in mentoring relationships (Reese and Loane 2012, 192). Second, spiritual directors learn to monitor their reactions so as not to indiscriminately interject their own story into the dyadic relationships (Barry and Connolly 1986, 170-174). Third, rather than teaching a certain method of prayer, spiritual directors are taught to help people find the prayer approach that works best for them (Hart 1980, 60). A spiritual director helps directees take ownership of their journey with God and not rely on the director for instructions (Barry and Connolly 1986, 60). Finally, spiritual directors familiarize themselves with the various movements in a person's devotional or personal prayer journey and learn to offer suggestions without being overly prescriptive (Guenther 1992, 71).

The project participants were drawn from the Brown Line Vineyard. Lay leaders in that church were approached and presented with the opportunity to participate in the research. Seven individuals chose to participate. The recruitment

email described the opportunity as one that would require a number of commitments, including interviews before and after the project, a two to three-hour introductory session, and weekly mentoring sessions for seven weeks. It also described a limited number of spaces available. Given these numerous requirements, the self-selection of the volunteers provided a context of a motivated set of participants who wanted to grow in personal prayer.

Models and Other Course Material

In creating the Enhanced Spiritual Continuum described in chapter four, I examined four models. These included the original Spiritual Continuum from the *Reveal* research done by Willow Creek Association, a traditional Roman Catholic model, a contemporary Catholic one, and an inferred model from John Wesley's ministry structures. For each stage of the original Spiritual Continuum, I explored personal spiritual practices, dyadic relationships, small groups, and dealing with suffering. For this project, two of those—dyadic relationships and personal spiritual practices—are being explored as a connected pair. More specifically, mentoring is the type of dyadic relationship being considered. It is being studied as a way to support personal prayer, which, in turn, is expected to positively impact spiritual growth.

Background from Spiritual Autobiography and Model of Spiritual Formation

I have described in chapter three the scriptural basis for the formational value of personal prayer and reading, mentoring, dealing with suffering, and small

groups. These practices were then used to enhance the Spiritual Continuum by providing practical suggestions for their use at each stage. In addition to the background from the Scriptures and the spiritual formation model, my personal experience with the benefits of mentoring relationships and personal prayer are recounted in my spiritual autobiography. Both have been significant in my journey. Additional theological foundation for how these activities are part of the larger view of Christian life is presented exceptionally well by John Wesley, to whose theology we now turn.

In my experience, negative reactions to an emphasis on mentoring in personal prayer are often caused by a fear of legalism—a concern about trying to earn God’s favor. This should not deter us, however, from exploring the solid theological foundations for personal prayer. John Wesley firmly believed that Christians should count on the righteousness of Christ for salvation—and nothing else (McGrath 2011, 340). Nonetheless, he insisted that the process of sanctification included ongoing spiritual growth toward holiness is driven by a love for God and humanity (McGrath 2011, 340). This love for God, therefore, is the foundation for the spiritual practice of personal prayer being explored in this project.

Wesley’s theology gave a prominent place to “means of grace,” by which we receive the grace we need to grow in sanctification. These means of grace included prayer and Scripture reading, which he grouped within a category he described as “instituted means of grace,” meaning that they were given by God to the church (Pedlar 2014, 115). In light of Wesley’s theology, then, this project

explores the means of grace of personal prayer. The process of sanctification to which Wesley refers, in the context of the spiritual formation models described above, would translate into transitions from one stage to the next as well as growth within those stages.

The framework that the mentor (myself in this case) worked from in this project is predicated on grace. This framework is now presented along with example questions and responses to help illustrate its use. One of the first things I encouraged participants to do in this framework was to describe their current experiences of personal prayer, including the approximate frequency and duration of those prayer times. The next question aimed at getting some clarity around how much grace each person had for prayer. This was ascertained by asking a question like “how much time can you spend in prayer daily without feeling like it’s a chore?” or “at what point does prayer feel like it is being forced?”

The next question was what did they feel called to in prayer? If their call was equal to or less than the grace they currently had for prayer, then the discussion turned to whether their personal circumstances (e.g., work or childcare responsibilities) allowed for the goal to be achieved. If so, that is the goal that was set. If not, more prayer and discernment was encouraged.

If on the other hand the duration of prayer the person felt called to was greater than what they had grace for, they were encouraged to ask for the grace to pray more. They were advised to do so in increments of five or ten minutes at a time. For example, if they felt they had enough grace to pray for ten minutes, but felt called to pray for thirty, they were encouraged to ask God for grace to pray

for fifteen minutes. When they felt they could pray for fifteen minutes without it feeling like a chore, they asked for the grace to pray twenty-five minutes. The pattern was repeated until the goal was reached.

Other Literature and Cases

The role of mentoring in Christian tradition is central to Jesus's ministry. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Coleman 2016) and *Mentoring for Mission* (Krallman 2002) provide a wealth of information on the biblical case for mentoring. In the former, Coleman provides a clear biblical model and mandate. In the latter, Krallman presents a strong case that Jesus's intentionality in mentoring was driven by his plan that the movement he was creating would be carried forward by the individuals he mentored. These texts provided the theological framework for the choice of mentoring as a primary form of encouraging growth. In addition to the biblical basis, further development of topics in mentoring is provided by Reese and Loane in *Deep Mentoring* (Reese and Loane 2012) and by Stanley and Clinton in *Connecting* (Stanley and Clinton 1992).

Deep Mentoring provides practical information on how attraction, developing trust and intimacy, responsiveness, accountability, and empowerment play substantial roles in mentoring (Reese and Loane 2012). These dynamics were used to inform the mentoring process in this project. Attraction and responsiveness were used as part of the recruiting process. The participants knew who the mentor would be, and their response was completely voluntary.

Empowerment was implemented by giving individuals responsibility for setting their goals. It was also encouraged by the open-ended nature of the questions. Participants gradually came to understand that they would not receive a step-by-step program that coached them with questions that led down a given path. Instead, they needed to own the mentoring experience as well as the prayer time and drive the discussion with their questions, challenges, and concerns. Finally, accountability was provided through weekly phone calls. Even though no accountability questions were asked, the simple regularity of the phone calls provided accountability that participants later reported to be helpful.

Connecting provides a good analysis of the different types of mentoring and in what context each is most effective (Stanley and Clinton 1992). This is particularly relevant to the discussion of stages in the spiritual formation models referenced above and to the consideration of when each type of mentoring may be most appropriate. Some individuals needed basic ideas of how to pray. As mentor I identified those situations and asked if the person wanted suggestions. At the other end of the spectrum were individuals who already knew what they needed to do; they only required encouragement and affirmation.

Finally, *Appreciative Inquiry* describes a method for setting vision and plans by leveraging previous successes and current strengths to develop desirable goals (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005). Similarly, this study began by focusing on individuals' past prayer practices that had worked best, and then gently guided them in discerning what goals God had for them in prayer. In this way, they were

empowered to set goals with God without authority figures or peers setting arbitrary goals championed by others, such as praying for an hour a day.

Proposed Project, Methodology, and Methods: How Will We Get There? How Will We Know We Are There?

This section describes the structure and organization of the project, which was initiated by asking for volunteers from the lay leaders of the church. Seven people signed up. They received initial instruction on how to get started in setting aside time to pray. This was followed by a seven-week period where they each received a weekly phone call to discuss how the prayer time was going. Each week they also received an email with a prompt to journal about their prayer experience. Finally, pre- and post-interviews were conducted with each individual. During the course of the project, a mixed methodology was used in a specific church context which will be described in detail.

Field

This project took place in the fall of 2016. The pastors created a list of lay leaders in the church. The individuals on the list received an email invitation to participate in the study. The list contained four individuals who had family relationships with the researcher and were therefore excluded. Later, two more individuals requested to participate. The total response was 7 people, two men and five women. Six of the participants were married. Two were married to each other and had a child under 18 months. Another married participant also had a child of approximately the same age. I have had mentoring relationships with some of

these individuals. Some have participated in retreats I have led, and others have been part of small groups I have led.

All individuals attended the Brown Line Vineyard and were of ages 26 to 35, which is representative of the majority demographic of the church. Five of the seven were white North Americans by birth and parentage. One was from a British family but had lived most of his life in the United States, with the exception of his first five years and some of his college years. One was from a family with one North American parent and one South American. This individual had grown up in South America, with significant exposure to North American culture, and had come to the United States for extended periods as a young adult, and had moved permanently two years prior to the study. The first set of interviews and the training seminar were conducted in early October 2016. The seven weeks of prayer mentoring took place between October 9, 2016 and concluded on November 26, 2016.

Scope

The scope of this project included determining mentoring's effectiveness in growing a person's personal prayer life. It identified the elements of mentoring that were most helpful to the individuals involved. It also looked at how changes in someone's personal prayer life impacts their relationship with God.

The study did not look at other factors that may have affected a person's personal prayer life positively, such as attending a small group or having close Christian friends. If such factors had been included, the number of variables to

study would not have been feasible within the time limitations of this study. Even though these other factors were not studied, they likely did have an impact and hopefully a positive one.

Methodology

A mixed methodology was used. It included survey and action research approaches. The interviews, journal entries, and the researcher's observations were all used as sources of data. Action Research, not unlike other types of research, starts with a problem to be solved, and in this case the problem was how to help individuals grow in personal prayer. However, it enables "groups of people to formulate mutually acceptable solutions to their problems" (Stringer 2014, 40). This is not a one-time event, but a cyclical one, where those solutions are evaluated and reformulated continuously (Stringer 2014, 35). In this study, the solutions devised with each participant to address their goals and challenges in personal prayer were constantly being evaluated through the weekly mentoring sessions and journal entries. Action Research involves the participants' perception and evaluation of what is occurring. This was done in an iterative fashion through the weekly journal entries. The final evaluation was done at the end with the post-study interviews. During the course of the study, the participants' responses to the mentoring input were incorporated into the project in the form of modifications to the framework for personal practices being used.

Appreciative Inquiry is a strength based approach to change management (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 133 of 1221). It also allows the participants to

replace criticism with “discovery, dream, and design” (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 226 of 1221). At the heart of this method is the appreciative interview, which is inherently positive, looking for the high points of the person’s or organization’s history (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 448 of 1221). In this study, during the first interviews, prior to the beginning of the mentoring, participants were asked to identify ways prayer had been most fruitful for them in the past. This is the first element of Appreciative Inquiry, the discovery phase (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 459 of 1221). The second phase of the approach is the “dream phase” (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 463 of 1221). In this case, the “dream phase” involves getting in touch with the inner desire to respond to a perceived call. The third is the design phase, where the call identified in the dream phase is turned into an actionable goal with the help of the mentor (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 496 of 1221).

Methods

Interviews were conducted with each participant before and after the seven weeks of mentoring. The interview questions can be found in tables 7 and 17. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, journal entries were made online by each of the participants on a weekly basis. These records were then coded and analyzed. This qualitative approach is most appropriate for this type of research due to the highly subjective nature of personal prayer experiences and the difficulty in quantifying the quality of mentoring and prayer experiences. Since I was both the researcher and the mentor, I adjusted the prayer framework

being presented based on how participants responded to it and recorded the suggestions I made after each mentoring session.

Three adjustments were made in the process of conducting the research. The first related to the participants' overwhelming preferences for weekly phone calls instead of in-person meetings. Although both were offered, only one participant wanted in-person meetings at the start. It became quickly evident however that those would be difficult to schedule, and she switched to weekly phone calls.

The second adjustment was the length of the calls. For the most part, phone calls were only around five to ten minutes. The calls would essentially start with a usual greeting, followed by the open ended question "how was prayer for you this past week?" Based on the participant's answer, my response could be encouragement, congratulations and affirmation, reframing, suggesting adjusting goals, suggesting different approaches to prayer they might try, offering insights into what might or might not be working and why, or other responses based on what was needed. In a few situations, they lasted almost an hour. The duration was adjusted to meet each participant's needs.

Third, it was discovered that the utility of the framework applied best to people who already knew how to pray. Although some were clear about what they felt called to in prayer, others were less so. Some needed basic input on how to pray, and some just needed help developing consistency. Strict adherence to the framework, therefore, was not absolutely necessary, and where it was helpful to deviate from it, that was done.

Phases and Timetables

Table 4. Phases of the study

Title	Dates	Description
Preparation Phase	August 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalized the questions to be used in the pre and post interviews, as well as the text of the weekly journaling prompt. Approached pastors of the Brown Line Vineyard to agree on the recruitment strategy. They provided the list of potential candidates.
Planning Phase	September 1 to October 8, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received approval from the Research Ethics Board on 9/27/2016. Sent email invitations to fourteen potential participants later that day. Answered questions from potential participants. Two additional individuals requested to participate than were originally recruited. Presented consent forms, which were signed and returned. Identified a transcriber, who filled out and returned a confidentiality agreement. Scheduled initial interviews, which were held from October 1 to October 4, 2016. Developed two-hour introductory workshop materials. Held two-hour workshop on October 8, 2016. Five of the seven participants attended. The other two received personal instruction time instead.
Mentoring Phase	October 9, 2016 to November 26, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held weekly mentoring sessions over the phone with only two exceptions. One was held in person at a coffee shop. Another was missed because the participant was outside the country. The phone calls ranged from four to forty-five minutes. They typically lasted between five and ten minutes. A total of forty-eight mentoring sessions were conducted.

Title	Dates	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor took post-meeting notes, detailing the suggestions made. • Mentor sent each participant a weekly email with a link to enter their one-paragraph journal reflection. • Mentor sent up to two reminders each week if a participant had not made a journal entry. No more than two reminders were sent because that would interfere with the following week's entry and confuse the participant. • Received a total of forty-six journal entries.
Final Interviews	December 3 and 4, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted final interviews with the seven participants.
Transcription and Coding	December 5 through 31, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed the transcription of the interview recordings. • Completed the first pass of coding and categorizing of the interviews before and after the seven weeks. • Completed the first pass of coding of the journal entries. • Completed tabulating the suggestions from mentor's post-meeting notes. • Analyzed all the sources of data mentioned above for themes and trends before the mentoring, during, and after, as well as for differences between the before and after comments. • Presented initial results to one of the two pastors. Discussed his desire to develop ideas for using the approach to create a broader ministry in the church.

Ethics in Ministry-Based Research

My dual role as both a lay leader and researcher could have created a power differential between myself and the study participants. This issue was mitigated by the nature of the research intervention itself. Since the intervention

was one of mentoring, which fit with my unofficial leadership role and previous experiences with that population, my research role did not present undue risk. Also, I am not in a position of authority over the participants, except that which comes with being a lay leader-at-large. During that time, I did not lead a ministry in which any of these individuals were involved.

Another ethical consideration was whether any undue guilt was experienced by the participants. This appears to be an inherent risk I have observed whenever the topic of personal spiritual practices is discussed. This risk was mitigated by clear messages to participants intended to defuse feelings of guilt or negative emotions. The intent and focus was on building desire, passion, and love for God rather than engendering guilt and motivating participants to achieve anything under their own power. Furthermore, this risk is inherent with church attendees in general, because for those who have a tendency toward guilt, any type of injunction to greater participation in a Christian practice may cause feelings of guilt. The risk therefore is not any greater than would be expected in regular church life. In addition, care was taken to provide a clear understanding of what to expect, and consent was freely given based on those expectations. The entire process was approved by the Tyndale Research Ethics Board and under the authority of the pastors of the church. For the individuals who participated, this project provided an opportunity to learn a different response to this invitation to a Christian practice: a response out of love, grace, and a desire for God, not guilt. For these participants, the freedom from guilt was the main benefit. These benefits far outweigh the minimal risks described above.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

Having described how the study was conducted, we now turn to the findings. These were generated by assigning codes to the pre- and post-study interviews, the weekly journal entries, and mentor's notes. Analysis of the results and their interpretation is also discussed. The findings from the histories individuals gave in the interviews prior to the beginning of mentoring show that periods felt to be most life-giving to the individual, on average, were periods where the following occurred with greater frequency than the other periods: high need, reading of the Bible and other Christian material, positive community, and instruction. The week to week journal entries showed a higher rate of positive prayer experiences than negative ones, as well as a higher rate of positive consequences than negative ones. The number of comments pertaining to positive prayer experiences doubled from before to after the seven weeks of mentoring. A similar positive difference was seen in the impact or consequences of that prayer in the participants' lives. Corresponding decreases were seen in the number of negative comments in those areas. More telling is the differences in these categories before the mentoring started and after, with an increase in positive comments and decrease in negative ones in the prayer experiences and their impact on the participants' lives. Finally, by analyzing the comments around mentoring input given and my notes as the mentor, a pattern of overcoming three types of obstacles became apparent. The first was in dealing with distraction, the second was in moving from a task oriented approach in prayer to a relational one, and the third from a sense of obligation and guilt to desire and freedom.

Findings

There were four sources for the information that was collected (data sets).

The first was the set of interviews conducted with each of the participants prior to the beginning of the seven weeks of mentoring. The second was the set of interviews conducted after the seven weeks were completed. The third was the weekly journal entries they entered. The fourth was the researcher's notes that were taken after each mentoring session. The sources of data are summarized in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Sources of data

Source of data	Number	Date Range
Pre-study interviews	7 interviews	10/01/2016 to 10/04/2016
Mentor's notes	48 entries	10/09/2016 to 11/26/2016
Journals	46 entries	10/09/2016 to 11/26/2016
Post-study interviews	7 interviews	12/03/2016 to 12/04/2016

Table 6. Mentoring sessions and journal entries by week

Week	Mentoring	Journal
1	6	7
2	7	7
3	7	7
4	7	6
5	7	6
6	7	6
7	7	7

Each of the sets of interviews was transcribed and, along with the journal entries, coded and categorized using the Initial Coding method (Saldana 2009, 81-82). The sets were further refined through a second cycle of coding using Pattern Coding (Saldana 2009, 152-155). The result of this second cycle of coding

contained inconsistencies in the way that codes were grouped in categories. Some codes were included in one group some of the time, and in another at other times. Therefore a third cycle of pattern coding was completed to correct the inconsistencies. The researcher's notes were coded for the types of suggestions given during each mentoring session as well. In summary then, themes were identified in the transcripts and were assigned a code, and codes that formed a common thread were grouped into categories.

Findings Around the Number of Stages Described

The first set of findings comes from the interviews conducted prior to the start of the mentoring. The questions asked during the first interview are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Question protocol for the pre-project interviews

Question #	Question text	Question prompts
1	If you are able to think of your devotional prayer life in terms of stages, can you describe each stage?	...
2	What was the stage that felt most spiritually life-giving?	...
3	What were your prayer practices at the time?	How frequent? How long? What felt life-giving about those prayer times? How did it affect your relationship with?
4	Can you describe your experience of devotional prayer in the last week?	How frequent? How long? What felt life-giving about those prayer times?

Question #	Question text	Question prompts
		How has it affected your relationship with God?

The first interview question asked participants to describe in their own words the stages of their personal prayer history. For example, someone might call using rote prayers during childhood stage 1 and praying conversationally in high school stage 2. The person might recall a third stage during college that was marked by a great need for God, reading the Bible for the first time, and daily conversational prayer. The number of stages reported ranged between three and eight.

The second question asked participants what stage had felt most life-giving. The majority identified the second and third stage. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Stages of personal prayer life identified by participants

Participant	Stages	Stage with most life
1	4	3
2	8	7
3	3	3
4	5	2
5	4	3
6	6	1, 2
7	4	3

Comparing the Most Life-Giving Stage with the Rest of the Stages

Questions two and three (about prayer practices) were used to discover participants' most life-giving phases (the definition of life-giving was left up to the individual's personal interpretation of what that meant for them). This

information has two purposes. First, it supports the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 34), which describe how reflecting on what has been most successful in the past can help focus a person's vision for the future. Second, the information enables deeper analysis of the life-giving stages. Information collected from questions two and three helped pinpoint common elements that lead to fruitfulness in prayer experiences.

To identify commonalities, it is helpful to compare the experiences that were life-giving with those that were not. Therefore, an analysis of the codes and categories and their frequency of occurrence was done. If the same category occurred with greater frequency during the life-giving stages compared with the other stages, it is likely to be a variable that promotes fruitful personal prayer. To do this comparison, the codes in each stage were counted. They were then divided into two groups: those that were noted by the interviewees as occurring during the most life-giving and those that were not. The totals in each of the two groups cannot be compared as is, however, because the number of phases in each are not equal. Participants were asked to identify only one most life-giving phase, whereas no limit was given to the number of other phases they could identify. Therefore, the number of codes and categories in the most life-giving phases will be less than the other phases. To correct for this, the number of stages in each of the two groups (most life-giving versus not) was tallied across all participants. The number of codes in each group was then divided by the stages in that group to get an average. Comparing the average number of codes in the life-giving group

with the average number of the same code in the other group gives a more balanced comparison.

For example, if we know that during these interviews, when the participants were talking about their most life giving phases, the number of times in total when they described a “Positive Prayer Experience” was 45. And we know that there was a total of 8 most life-giving phases (because each of the seven had one, except one participant who identified two), then dividing 45 by 8, gives us the average in Table 9 of 5.63. Similarly, when the participants talked about all the other stages, they identified a total of 26 (see Table 8), and the total number of times they described a “Positive Prayer Experience” when discussing those stages was 16, then dividing the 16 total comments by the 26 total phases gives an average of 0.62 as shown in Table 9.

Given that this is a qualitative observation, the average occurrences of these codes can only tell us the themes that appear to be emerging from this study as we contrast the most life giving phases with all the other phases. Further quantitative studies will need to be done to establish the generalizability of the findings.

Table 9 shows the average of experiences in the most life-giving phases versus other phases. All the categories of codes that on average had a higher frequency in the life-giving stages than the other stages are included in this table (for a more detailed table, see Table 31 in Appendix 4, and for a comprehensive list of codes in all the categories, see Table 45 in Appendix 4).

Table 9. Difference in average count of codes between phases identified as most life-giving and other phases

Category	Average count in most life-giving phases (8 phases)	Average count in other phases (26 phases)	Difference
Positive prayer experience	5.63	0.62	5.01
Positive impact/consequence of prayer	3.75	0.15	3.60
Positive experience unattributed	1.25	0.23	1.02
Time of high need	1.38	0.23	1.14
Christian spiritual reading other than Bible	1.13	0.19	0.93
Positive community	1.13	0.27	0.86
Instruction	0.75	0.23	0.52
Bible reading	1.00	0.54	0.46
Positive desire	0.50	0.08	0.42
Positive mentoring experience	0.13	0.04	0.09
Neutral prayer experience	0.00	0.08	-0.08
Positive expectation	0.13	0.08	0.05

An overview of the categories from this table is shown below. Each category is a group of codes around central themes. The description of each category's theme from the table follows:

"Positive prayer experience," the theme with the greatest difference, is self-explanatory, describing prayer experiences that were positive in some way. One participant for example said "I would just sit for hours with God. And not asking for anything, not thinking anything, just like being in his presence, and that was the most fulfilling my prayer life has ever been."

"Positive consequence of prayer" includes comments about the impact of personal prayer on the rest of life, such as "I would just be more peaceful in every other area of my life because [I would be] more relational. I was more honest, I was more [able to be] vulnerable because I was confident . . . I just felt like completely seen and loved and felt allowed to just be myself everywhere else."

"Positive experience unattributed" is when a participant made a comment that was positive but not directly attributed to prayer, such as "I felt God's faithfulness more closely than . . . any other stage in my life."

"High need," the most common theme, describes a time of great need for God in the participants' lives.

"Christian spiritual reading" reports participants' reading of Christian spiritual content that was not the Bible itself.

"Positive community" indicates periods where the person described a positive experience of community.

"Instruction" describes the positive benefit of various types of instruction, such as teaching, mentoring, or advice from peers.

"Bible reading" refers to informational, reflective, random, or structured reading of the Bible.

"Positive desire" describes comments about wanting to be close to God, to pray, or to engage in other Christian activities.

"Neutral prayer experience" represents comments about prayer that were neither positive nor negative, sometimes inconsistent, and so on.

One participant described prayer during his commute time in these neutral terms: "It feels like maintenance prayer."

"Positive expectation" describes comments indicating a positive feeling, usually excitement, toward personal prayer, such as "I was just very excited to spend time with God."

"Positive mentoring experience" describes comments given to the participant by a helpful individual, such as a youth pastor, but not necessarily in the context of a formal mentoring relationship.

Figure 1 shows the data in Table 9 as a bar graph. Each category presents three measures. The first bar in each group shows the average number of codes during the most life-giving phases. The definition of life-giving was left up to each individual's self-perception. The second bar shows the average across the rest of the phases. The third bar shows the difference between the first two bars. The larger the third bar, the more likely this variable plays a role in making personal prayer more fruitful.

The top three rated experiential categories, as measured by the difference columns, shown in figure 1 are all to be expected. Clearly, the more life-giving

stages include on average more comments about positive prayer experiences, about the positive consequences of prayer, and comments that are positive in general. This affirms, in a qualitative fashion, that the coding methods described by Saldana work well in describing the phenomena at hand (Saldana 2009, 81–82, 152–155).

The next set of categories show that periods of perceived high personal need tend to be periods that nurture spiritual vitality (Romans 5:3-4, and 1 Peter 1:6-7). That is not surprising and recalls C. S. Lewis's famous saying: “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (Lewis 1962, 83). This category is not to be confused with challenging circumstances, where the theme is one of difficulty finding time to pray because of life circumstances that make it difficult to do so.

Moreover, the categories of positive community experiences, instruction, reading of spiritual material in addition to the Bible, reading the Bible, and feeling a desire for God all have an observable gap between most fruitful phases and all other phases. These would be the areas worth exploring further in terms of their ministry implications.

The last four categories in figure 1 are more difficult to interpret. First, the differences between life-giving phases and the rest of the phases are small. Second, two of the categories, positive desire and positive expectation, could be caused by or the results of a highly fruitful prayer season. Third, the neutral

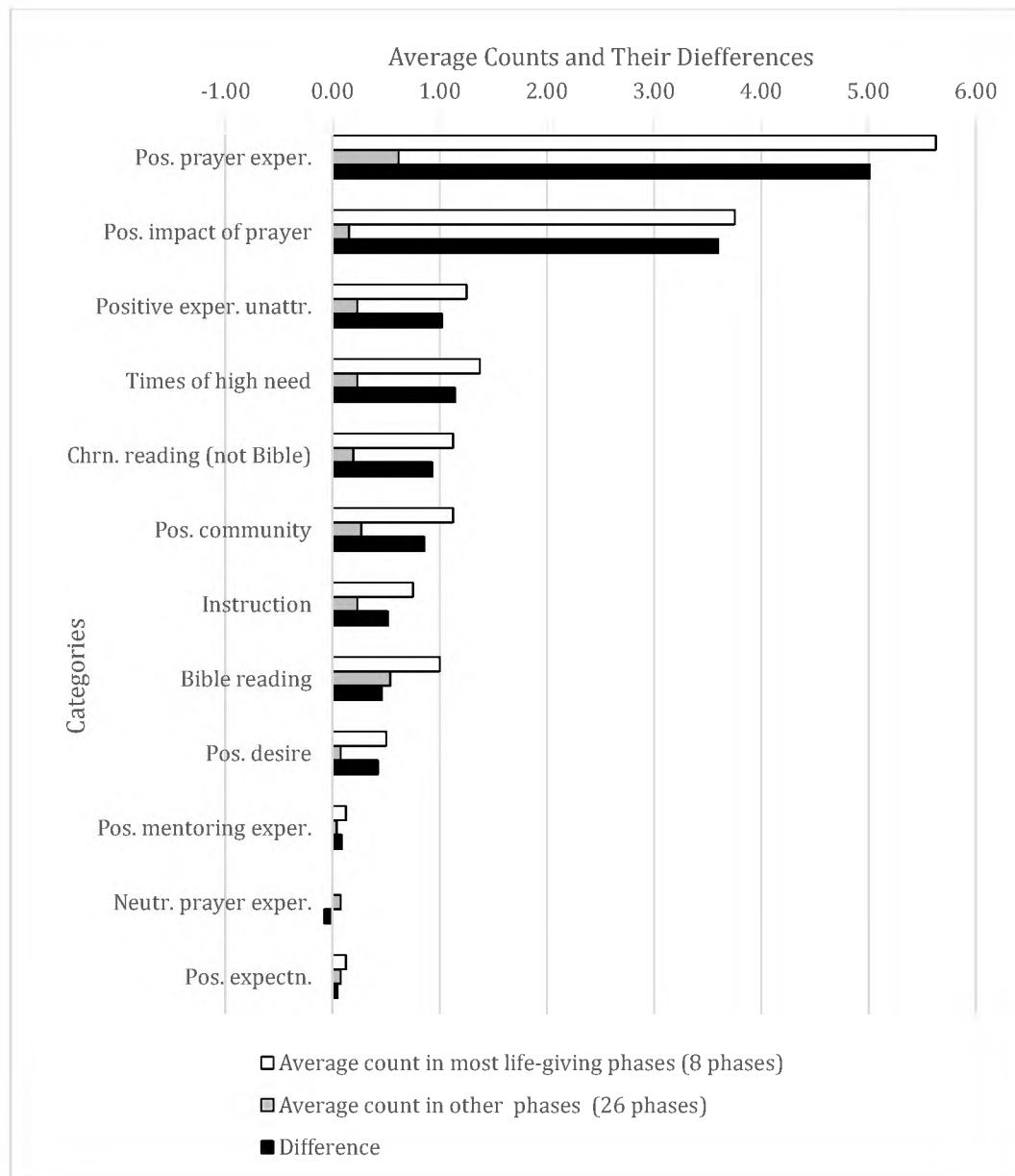


Figure 1. Difference in average occurrences between phases identified as most life-giving and other phases

prayer category is precisely that, neutral, and adds little insight. It would have been helpful to have a greater difference for the mentoring category given that this is what is being studied. That it is not, however, is not discouraging

because mentoring in prayer was simply not mentioned, and so was very possibly not available in most participants' lives.

Did the Participants Reuse What Was Most Life-Giving?

In addition to the above aggregate observations from the first set of interviews, an additional analysis was conducted that compared each participant's most life-giving phase with what they chose to do or not do in the study. This was done by comparing themes and practices from the pre-study interviews that were associated with the most life-giving phases, with themes that were described in the journal entries during the study. For the most part, the life-giving practices from the past did not correspond with practices participants employed during the study.

One participant reported corresponding experiences of receiving good instruction in a previous life-giving phase as well as during the study. Two participants noted Bible reading in their most life-giving phases, but only one reported it in the study. Two other individuals reported positive community experiences during their most life-giving phases but did not cite similar experiences during the study. Although only one person reported positive desire during a most life-giving phase and in the study, four others referred to it in the study alone. This could be because they were motivated to participate in the study. Finally, two participants reported reading Christian spiritual material other than the Bible but did not report doing so during the study.

This lack of correspondence between experience and practices during the most life-giving phase and the current phase is, therefore, inconclusive. It is possible, as will be discussed later, that what worked for someone in their most life-giving stage no longer works. That is possibly why the participants naturally chose a different approach in this study.

Week-to-Week Journal Entries During the Mentoring Period

As described in the field and scope sections above, participants filled out a journal entry each week. They received an email with the following prompt: "Please write a paragraph describing your experience of devotional prayer during the past week." These journal entries were analyzed as described in the findings section above. Themes were identified in each journal entry and given a code. Similar codes were later grouped into categories. Three groups of categories were of particular interest because the participants described them with positive and negative value (for a full list of categories from the journal entries see Table 32 in Appendix 4). These three groups of positive and negative categories are shown in tables 10 and 11 and in figure 2. The corresponding groupings of codes that make up each of the categories in tables 10 and 11 are discussed in greater detail in the following section, and the codes are listed in tables 12, 13 and 14.

The first group of positive and negative comments fell into the pair of categories around positive and negative prayer experiences. The second group fell into the categories of positive and negative consequences of prayer. The third group of categories were described as "other negative or positive." For the "other

positive” portion of that grouping, we have the categories of positive mentoring experiences, positive desire, and positive expectation. For the corresponding “other negative” group, we only have the category of challenges to prayer.

Table 10. Attributable positive comments in journal entries

Positive comments	Count
Positive prayer experience:	76
Positive impact/consequence of prayer:	66
Other positive (includes Positive mentoring experience, Positive desire, and Positive expectation):	48
Total positive comments	190

Table 11. Attributable negative comments in journal entries

Negative comments	Count
Negative prayer experience	32
Negative impact/consequence of prayer	1
Other negative (includes Challenge to prayer):	26
Total negative comments	59

The data is encouragingly positive. The number of positive comments in all three categories is greater than the number of negative comments. Since the source of the information is from the journals kept during the weeks of mentoring, figure 2 shows mentoring's positive impact on personal prayer. Comments regarding the quality of people's prayer experiences exceeded negative comments by more than two-to-one. Participant feedback reflected the strong impact of prayer on their lives, with only one negative comment out of 67. The other categories show almost twice as many positive comments as negative.

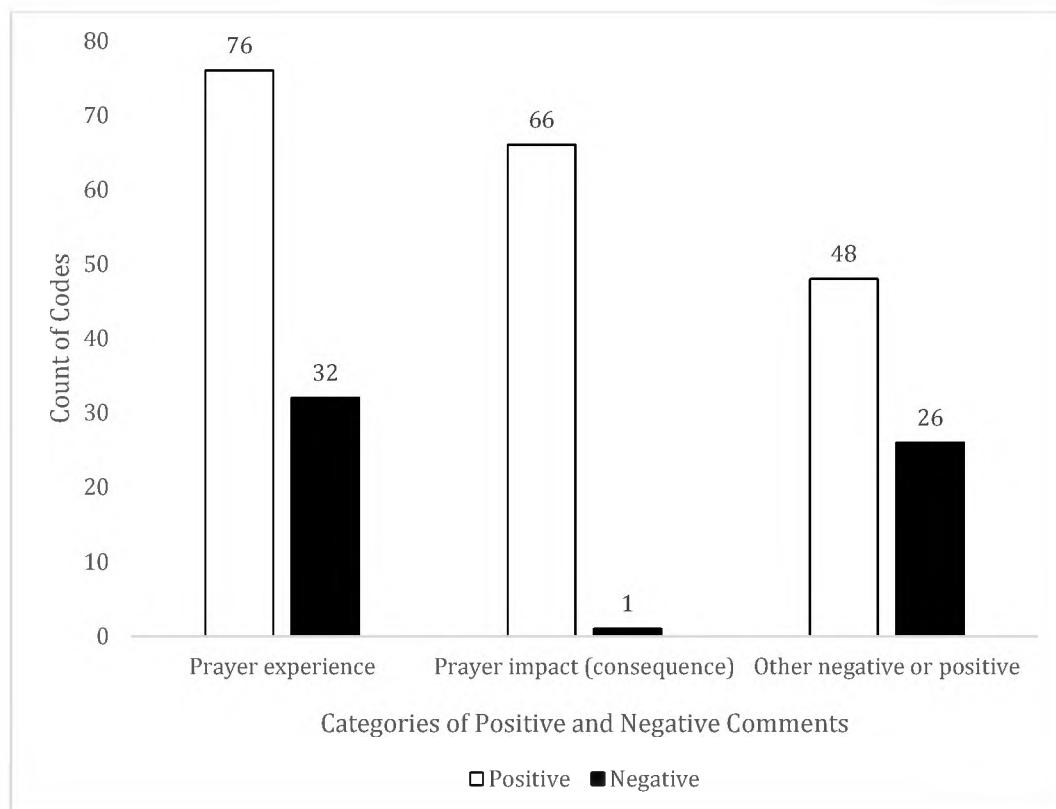


Figure 2. Count of relevant codes in negative vs. positive categories in journal entries during the mentoring period

As previously mentioned, each category is a grouping of codes. In order to understand more clearly what the participants are saying, it is worth looking at the codes that make up each category. It is to this analysis that we now turn in the next three sections. In the interest of looking for larger patterns, only codes that were mentioned more than once are included below in tables 12 through 16. The tables showing the complete set of codes for each category are in Appendix 4, tables 32 through 37.

What Makes Up Positive and Negative Prayer Experiences in the Journals?

The first category of positive prayer experiences shown in Table 12 does not provide detail about the nature of the experience. These would be comments like “my prayer in the past week has been great” or “My experience with devotional prayer last week was overall good.” However, most of the remaining categories show a shift toward a more relational experience in prayer. This is seen first in participants’ most frequent comment about a sense of connection with God. People also reported the sense that God is speaking into their lives and that they desired to share their feelings with him.

Table 12. Codes referenced more than once in positive prayer experiences

Codes	Count
Unspecified positive prayer experience	20
Feeling connected in prayer	11
Hearing God	6
Increased focus in prayer	5
Fruitful	4
Sharing feelings with God	4
Being consistent in prayer	3
Feeling encouraged in prayer	2
Peace in prayer	2

The comments about the ability to focus in prayer and experience fruitfulness are smaller than their negative counterparts in Table 13. There are nine comments about distraction in Table 13 compared with five about focus in Table 12. There are five comments about doubt and futility in Table 13 compared with four about fruitfulness in Table 12. Since this is a qualitative study, the difference in numbers here is not enough to say that mentoring is not adequately

addressing the issues for these participants. What we do see is that the presence of these comments, both positive and negative, tell us that these are real issues that the participants are dealing with in their prayer lives, and, therefore, they need to be addressed.

Table 13. Topics referenced more than once in negative prayer experiences

Codes	Count
Distraction	9
Inconsistent prayer times	7
Feelings of futility	3
Experiencing doubt	2
Mood affecting prayer	2
Unspecified negative prayer experience	2

What Makes Up Positive and Negative Impact Attributed to Prayer in the Journals?

Having looked at the experience of prayer itself, it is now worthwhile to examine the impact of prayer on the rest of the participants' lives as shown in Table 14. The powerful and positive impact of prayer on peace is evident, reported nearly twice as much as the next benefit. Contributing to peace are less anxiety and greater resilience, which were noted several times. This brings to mind the well-known injunction from Paul in Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." It is also mentioned as a fruit of the Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Table 14. Codes referenced more than once in positive impact/consequences of prayer

Codes	Count
Sense of peace	17
Gained insight	9
Sense of hope	5
Demonstrated more resilience in life due to prayer	5
Life-giving	4
Having a positive ministry impact	4
Gratitude in life	3
Less anxiety	3
Answered prayer	2
Sense of connection	2
Sense of faith	2

In fact, most of the remaining items in the table recall the fruits of the Spirit, mentioned by Paul in the letter to the Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” If advancing further along the continuum of spiritual growth involves growing in the fruits of the Spirit, then it is easy to see that personal prayer plays a role in this. One can see, for example, that having more hope, more life, and more gratitude are all related to increased joy. Feeling an increased sense of connection and having a positive ministry impact are indicative of more love for God and others.

The only reported experience that was negative was a frustration that the participant’s prayer time did not have a greater impact on the rest of her life. This could even be viewed positively as a desire for more connection with God.

What Makes Up the Remaining Positive and Negative Comments in the Journals?

The remaining categories from the journal entries are shown in tables 15 and 16. In Table 15 we see participants' desire for more of God (desire more of God) and to discern his will (discernment). Both positive desires are reminiscent of many of the psalms in which a thirst for God is expressed (e.g., Psalm 42:2: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Also see Psalm 118:81, 63:1, and 143:6).

Table 15. Positive comments that more than once expressed positive desire, positive expectation, or positive mentoring experiences

Category	Codes	Counts
Positive desire	Desire more	11
	Discernment	6
Positive expectation	Hopeful expectation	8
	Excited to pray	3
Positive mentoring experience	Grace during the study (e.g., remembering to have grace for oneself when tempted to be legalistic, or taking mentor's input into account to not feel guilty for not praying on the week-end)	8
	Mentoring re distraction	3
	Mentoring to desire	2

Table 16. Negative comments that more than once expressed challenges setting aside time to pray

Category	Codes	Counts
Challenge	Challenging circumstances	20
	Busyness	3
	Unspecified challenge	2

The codes in the positive expectation category are not unexpected, but they are intriguing. Missionary and psychiatrist John White speaks of an innate

expectation of a positive experience when we reach out to God in prayer (White 1976, 21–22). Some mentioned specifically that they were excited to pray, others expressed a more generally hopeful expectation, such as “looking forward to next week.” The presence of these comments could also suggest a level of faith that the participants have in the promise of Jesus to meet our hunger and thirst as we come to him (John 4:13-14).

The comments labelled as positive mentoring codes are exceptionally relevant. First, because the presence of these comments related to distraction in the mentoring category indicate that it is an issue that should be addressed in mentoring. Second, the data shows participants’ positive experience with mentoring characterized by grace and desire stands in stark contrast to being motivated by self-discipline, performance, or obligation. These were mentioned a total of 11 times in the pre-study interviews.

As for the remaining negative comments, the vast majority were related to the impact of daily circumstances on participants’ time. This surprisingly high number of comments is indicative of the volatility of people’s schedules. Challenges ranged from out-of-town guests to sick babies, changes in work schedules, and so on. As the mentor, I had the opportunity to demonstrate grace and affirmation to participants as they struggled to keep their commitments in the midst of life’s challenges.

Comparing Comments Regarding Personal Prayer Before and After the Seven Weeks of Mentoring

The third set of findings comes from comparing the first set of interviews with the second. The questions for the first set of interviews were described in Table 7. The questions for the second set are in Table 17.

Table 17. Question protocol for the post-project interviews

Qn #	Question text	Question prompts
1	Can you describe your experience of devotional prayer in the last week	How frequent? How long? What felt life-giving about that time? How has it affected your relationship with God?
2	What were the most helpful things to you in this project?	...
3	What was the least helpful?	...
4	What improvements would you suggest for the future?	...

As can be seen in both tables 7 and 17, there is a question about the participant's experience of prayer during the previous week. Comparing the responses from the first set of interviews with those from the final interviews is instructive. Each set of responses was coded and categorized as described earlier. For a full list of codes and totals by categories compared, see tables 39 and 40 in Appendix 4. The comparison of the categories of responses is shown in Table 18.

Table 18. Positive comments in answer to question about last week's experience in prayer before (pre) and after (post) the study

Category	Pre	Post
Positive prayer experience	10	23
Positive impact/consequence	8	19
Positive desire	14	6
Positive expectation	1	0

The number of positive comments about the experience of prayer and its impact increased over 100%. The positive desire and positive expectation decreased. The high number in the pre-study interviews for the last two categories could represent people's enthusiasm as they looked forward to participating in the study, whereas the post-interviews were retrospective by nature and therefore less future focused. It could also be that their desires and expectations were, to some degree at least, met during the period of mentoring.

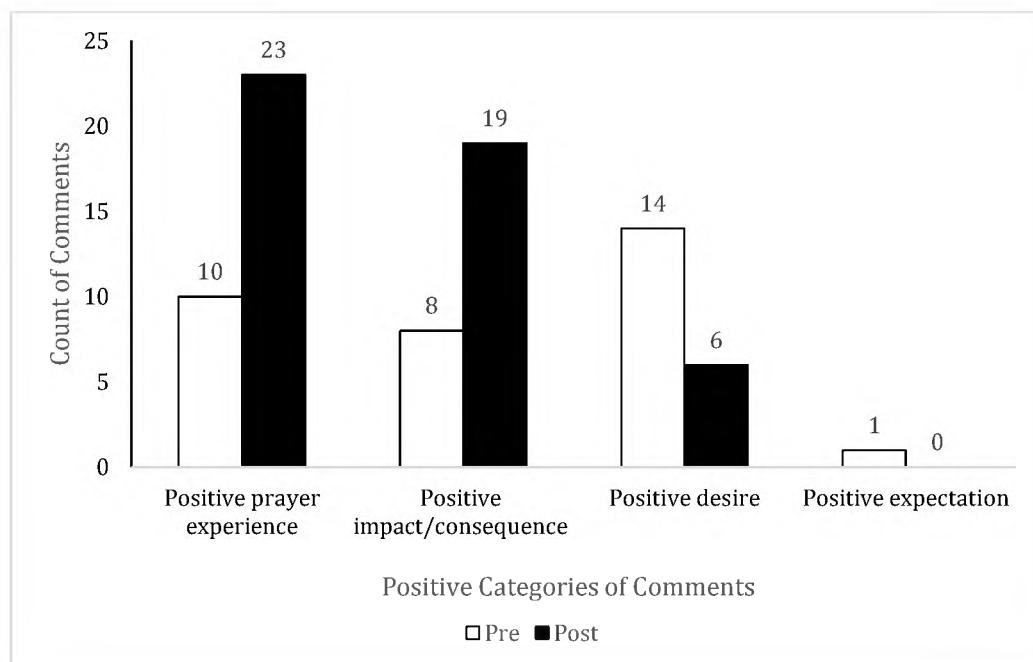


Figure 3. Comments in positive categories about experience of last week's prayer experience before (pre) and after (post) the study

The negative comments are shown in Table 19. The decreases from pre to post are consistent across the board, and they are dramatic. There are two negative comments compared with forty-six positive. The decreases in negative experiences are more dramatic than the increases of the positive shown in Table 18. Mentoring appears to be a powerful tool for removing obstacles that inhibit personal prayer experience and effectiveness, with the added benefit of increasing positive experiences. There is of course the possibility of desirability bias in these results, and this has to be acknowledged. However the consistency of the results across multiple categories, across multiple types of questions, and the way each and every participant reported positive results reduces the possibility that these results are purely due to desirability bias.

Table 19. Negative comments in answer to question about last week's experience in prayer before (pre) and after (post) the study

Category	Pre	Post
Negative prayer experiences	32	1
Negative impact/consequences of prayer	5	1
Prayer from performance, obligation, pressure, or discipline	3	0
Negative experiences unattributed	4	0
Repeating negative cycle	3	0

Figures 3 and 4 tell a compelling story. There is a decrease in negative experiences of prayer and an increase in positive. There is a decrease in negative impact and an increase in positive impact of prayer. This combination of decrease in the negative and increase in the positive shows the fruitful result of the mentoring effort, not only in the improvement of the participants' prayer lives, but in the quality of their relationships with God.

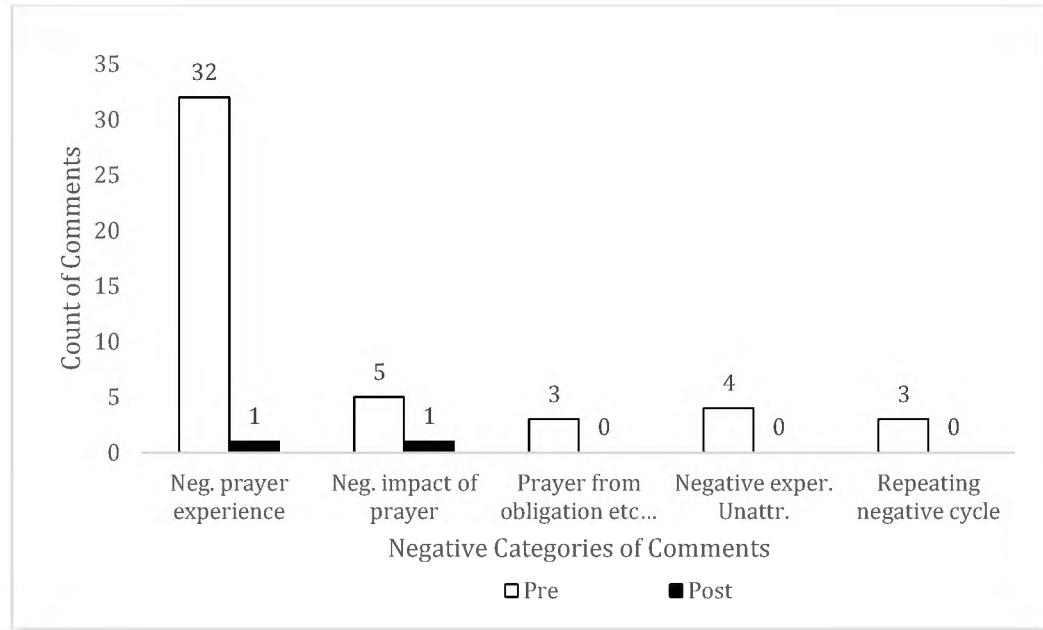


Figure 4. Comments in negative categories about experience of last week's prayer experience before (pre) and after (post) the study

Assessing the Seven Weeks in Their Totality

In addition to the question about their experience of the last week of prayer, the participants were asked in the post-interview about their overall experiences of the last seven weeks. The positive and negative comments are analyzed across the same categories used in the analysis of the journal entries. The results are shown in figure 5.

Additional data was gleaned from the post-interviews regarding overall feedback and participants' suggestions for improvement as well. The full list of categories and codes appears in Appendix 4 Table 45. As for the positive and negative comments, the same pattern emerges as seen previously. There is a strong ratio of positive-to-negative experiences in prayer and its impact on

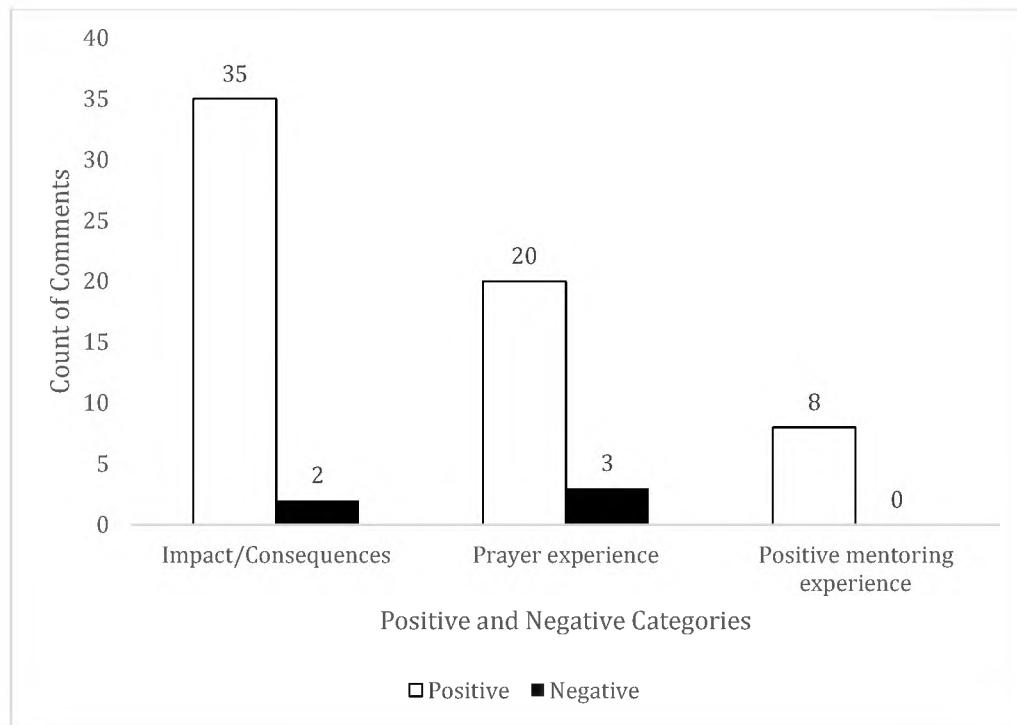


Figure 5. Positive and negative comments from the categories describing the last 7 weeks from the post interviews

relationship with God. There is also a positive overall experience of the mentoring process.

Triangulation

Information showing that mentoring had an overall positive impact on participants' prayer experiences and, consequently, on their relationships with God is supported by data from three data sets, shown in Table 20. The sets display the same preponderance of positive comments. Once again desirability bias is a distinct possibility in each of these, however the multiple sources of data showing the same patterns helps to reduce that likelihood.

Table 20. Total count of positive and negative impact and prayer experiences attributed to prayer from various sources

Source	Prayer experiences		Impact of prayer	
	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg
Entries in journals during the 7 weeks	20	3	35	2
The week after the mentoring phase	23	1	19	1
Reflections on the last 7 weeks	20	3	35	2

Types of Input Given in Mentoring

We now turn to a set of findings from the researcher's notes. They show the types of input used in the 48 mentoring sessions. There were 25 recorded instances of input. Some were repeated, of course, but overall, they can be categorized into 15 types. Those in turn were grouped into central themes as shown in Table 21. Central to the mentoring effort were dealing with distraction; motivating through grace and relationship instead of task, guilt, and performance; and instruction.

Table 21. Types of input given during mentoring sessions

Themes	Types of input	Counts
Distraction	Distraction in and from prayer	3
Grace	Reduce prayer on weekends	3
	Ask for grace	2
	Reassurance	2
	Grace for self	1
	Identify legalism	1
Instruction	15 Minute frustration	1
	Coffee	1
	Discernment	1
	How to read	1
	How to start	1
Relationship	Bring feelings to God	3

Themes	Types of input	Counts
Other	Move list prayers to other time	2
	Additional topics beyond prayer	2
	Other	1

The Role of Logistics

Table 22 shows various types of logistical themes around when and where individuals practiced personal prayer. This information was drawn from all the sources of data in this study. One logistical preference was praying in the morning, which was cited five times. Although not a universal preference, a preference for morning prayers occurred frequently enough to be noticeable. Second, people cited praying while commuting. However, participants commonly referred to this as a supplemental form of personal prayer. One person called it “maintenance prayer” because it was enough to stay engaged with God but not to move forward spiritually. Finally, four people felt it necessary to make a logistical change to reach their prayer goals.

Table 22. Logistics related to prayer

Codes	Counts
Expressing high value for praying in the morning	5
Praying during commute time	4
Made logistical change to allow for prayer	3
Inconsistent time of day	2
Praying while running	1

Evaluating the Mentoring

The helpfulness of the mentoring is apparent in the journal entries and the post-study interviews. Table 23 shows ten comments citing experiences of grace during mentoring. These appeared to be internalized understandings of concepts presented in the mentoring sessions as well as the introductory presentation. Additionally, five other comments were made about the mentor's input towards grace. There seems to be appreciation as well for helpful suggestions about how to deal with distraction and suggestions in general. Finally, participants noted the mentor's aid in shifting them away from motivation by guilt, shame, or performance.

Table 23. Comments around positive experiences of mentoring

Codes	Counts
Experienced grace during the study	10
Mentoring towards grace	5
Mentoring towards desire	4
Helpful suggestion from mentor	4
Mentoring regarding distraction	3
Mentoring away from guilt, shame, or pressure	2
Appreciated open ended questions	1

Evaluating the Ministry

At the end of the seven weeks of mentoring, during the post interviews, participants were asked a number of questions about their experience. What was most helpful? What improvements would they suggest? Would a program like this be more effective if it was not as focused on prayer? Would a more generalized scope that included all aspects of relationship with God be more

effective? How useful was journaling? What would help individuals make the practices a permanent part of their lives? The responses to these questions are shown in Table 24.

Table 24. Suggestions for improvement from post interviews

Category	Codes	Counts
Suggestions for improvement?	Vary the questions week to week	4
	Add a meeting at the end for everyone	3
	More opportunity to share with everyone	1
Feedback on journaling reflection	Journaling helped reflect	2
	Journaling was reinforcing	2
	Did not like journaling online	1
	Felt journaling reflection was redundant	1
	Journaling helped to connect with self	1
	Journaling provided helpful structure	1
	Negative experience of journaling reflection	1
	Positive experience of journaling reflection	1
What was most helpful?	Accountability	4
	Consistency	4
	Instruction	2
	Structure	2
	Mentor's reframing	1
	Sense of community	1
	Sense of ownership	1
	You can choose something doable	1
What will help make this stick?	Experienced the benefits	2
	Instruction	2
	Learned how to deal with distraction	1
	Learned how to keep it doable	1
	Learned multiple methods	1
	Mentoring	1

Category	Codes	Counts
	Motivated by grace	1
Phone logistics	Frequency is appropriate	5
	Duration is appropriate	2

The consensus from participants was that the program would be more effective if it focused on prayer and was not broadened to give equal treatment to other topics. There was also interest in having a second meeting at the end to create a greater sense of community. Feedback on journaling was that it was helpful but not universally so. The duration and frequency of the mentoring sessions was felt to be appropriate.

The most helpful aspects of the project were perceived to be accountability and consistency. This is of particular note, given the mentoring sessions were intentionally positive and affirming. It seems that simply knowing a question was going to be asked about their experience created a sense of accountability among the participants. On the other hand, when asked what, if anything, from the experience would help make it a more permanent practice for them, people responded that receiving input was the most helpful. One participant noted that the instructional seminar at the beginning had been most helpful.

As described in Table 4, there were two individuals that did not participate in that and the material was shared with them in individual sessions. They did not therefore have the chance to comment on that. Although the sample size is very small, the differences that could be of interest between the two groups is that those who attended the instructional seminar had an average of 19 comments around positive prayer experiences compared with 13 for those who did not. Their

comments around positive mentoring experiences were also higher, 5.2 to 0.5 on average. Those who attended the seminar expressed on average less concerns around challenges compared to those who did not, 2.8 to 8. This could possibly argue for the greater effectiveness of the initial instructional group seminar over individual instruction, but the sample size is too small to see trends clearly.

Interpretations

These findings from the participants' experiences of prayer before the study, plus the findings from the journal entries and post-study interviews, were integrated into a diagram showing the first building blocks of a model in figure 6. The model consists of three possible obstacles that are commonly faced in this context. They each require a transition that consists of overcoming these obstacles. The obstacles and the transitions needed to overcome them are: 1) obligation and task to invitation and relationship, 2) guilt and shame to grace and freedom, and 3) distraction to focus.

In addition, some individuals experienced more than one obstacle at a time. It is easy to see how these obstacles interact together in a way that makes them even more difficult to overcome. Since this is not a quantitative study, it is not possible to ascertain whether the presence of more than one obstacles was a greater challenge than the sum of the two obstacles together. Nonetheless, even though this is speculative, it is reasonable to assume that a mindset of task and obligation, feelings of guilt and shame, interact with each other in a way that makes the experience of each even more acute. The presence of feelings of guilt

and shame make it hard to focus, and the lack of focus produces even more guilt and shame.

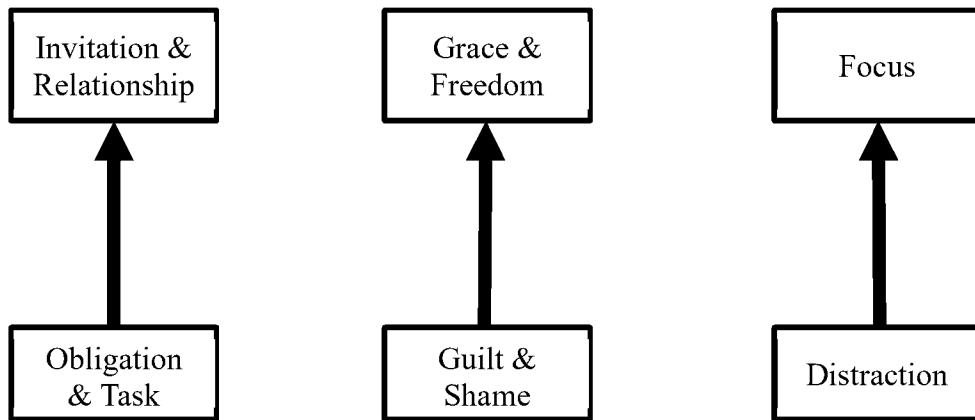


Figure 6. Obstacles and transitions

The positive end states that are reached in these transitions are: 1) a sense of invitation and relationship, 2) grace and freedom, and 3) the ability to focus. These interact with each other in a positive way. A mindset of invitation and relationship results in an atmosphere of grace and freedom, and vice versa. Grace and freedom would also result in a greater ability to focus. These interactions are shown below in figure 7.

Participants were able to make these transitions primarily through the aid of the mentoring program as shown in figure 8. The mentoring program included elements of community and instruction as well as reading the Bible and other Christian spiritual writing. Although reading the Bible and other Christian literature was not emphasized in this study, they were highlighted in the participants' previous experiences as correlated with life-giving prayer.

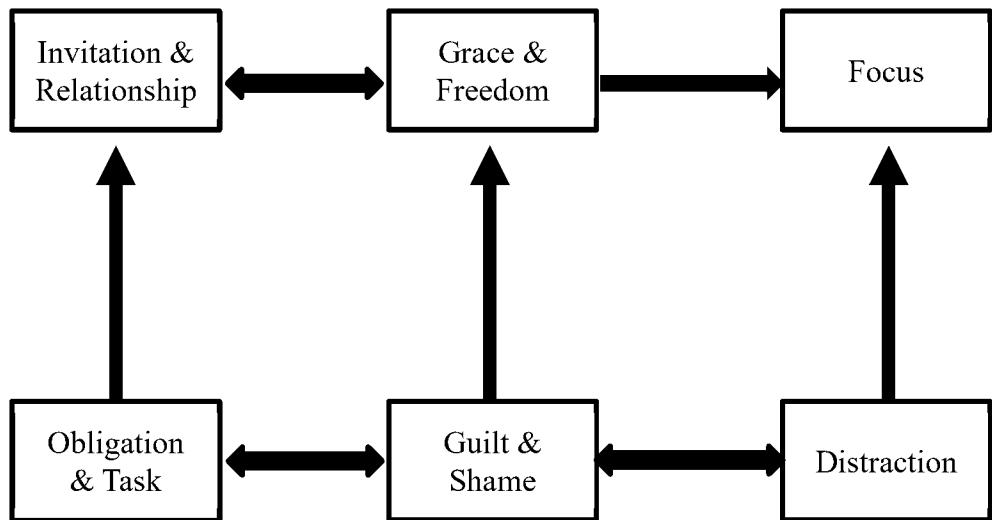


Figure 7. Interactions between obstacles and between desired states

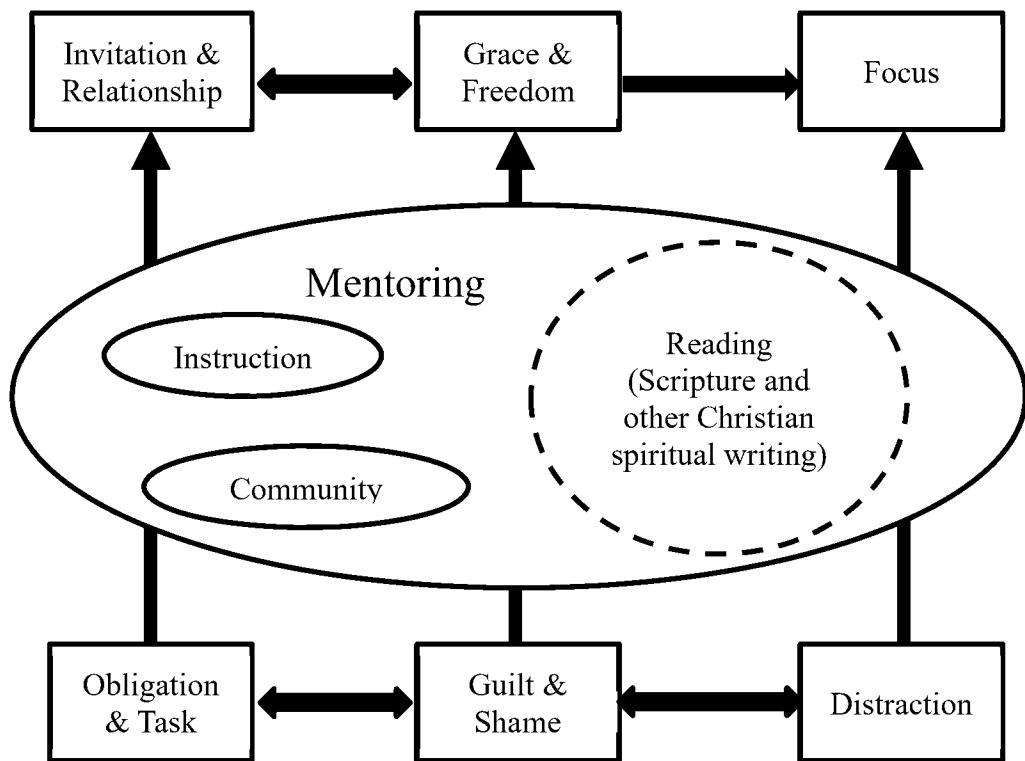


Figure 8. Model of growth in personal prayer in this context

At the beginning of this study, none of the participants in this study noted that their current practice of personal prayer was the most life-giving. They were

each stuck in some way. They were not able to move forward mainly due to obstacles of distraction, feelings of guilt and shame, as well as a sense of prayer as a task or duty coming out of obligation. They had not been able to transition on their own out of distraction and to greater focus, or out of feelings of guilt and shame towards grace and freedom, or out of a sense of prayer as task and obligation to a desire to pray in a relationally satisfying way. Some were stuck in just one or two of these areas, and some were stuck in all three. Some were partially stuck, and others were completely stalled. Regardless of where they were stuck, they were able to move forward and make the needed transitions.

There is also confirmation in these results of the impact of prayer on the participants' spiritual lives. The increase in spiritual fruit as discussed in the findings section describing the positive and negative impact attributed to prayer in the journals is supportive, in a qualitative fashion, of the quantitative findings from Willow Creek (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 117). If Ignatius of Loyola were here today, he would likely feel well vindicated by these results. His strongly held belief that spiritual directors focus on personal prayer of their directees is confirmed here, albeit in a different type of dyadic relationship (Dirks 2013, location 2377 of 3406).

How Mentoring Is Helpful

The findings in this study confirm the value of mentoring others in personal prayer, at least in this context. The synergistic increase in positive comments shown in figure 3 and decrease in negative ones shown in figure 4 speak convincingly to the improvement in the quality of the prayer experience. If

some part of the mentoring effort improved participants' prayer lives, then the next logical question is how was it helpful. The first answer comes from a pair of data points, the first regarding the category of comments around challenges to prayer, and the second in answer to the question of what was most helpful in the program during the post-study interviews.

The challenges to prayer cited most often were due to changing circumstances. Whether it was a baby's teething problems, a new job, a changing commute time, or any other set of unexpected events, modern life has many of them, and they impact prayer. Most participants cited accountability as the most helpful thing in the program (see Table 24). This is most likely the key antidote to challenges created by changing circumstances. It helps to talk to a supportive person, get suggestions about the challenges, with the understanding that there will be another opportunity to talk about it the following week. As supportive as that second conversation will likely be, just the knowledge of its coming appears to be enough of a motivator to implement one or more of the suggestions. This finding will now be explored further.

The answers to two of the final interview questions makes the case for the value of follow-up by the mentor. One of the questions asked (Table 17, question 2) was what was most helpful in the overall experience of the participants. In answer to that question, accountability was mentioned most frequently. Knowing that they were to reflect on their prayer lives with a mentor each week helped provide accountability.

The second of the two questions (Table 17, question 3) was what will help make these new prayer practices more long-lasting. The mentor's input was the most frequent type of response. This input is essentially instruction given as gentle suggestions. This corroborates the importance of instruction as a differentiating variable and enabler of life-giving personal prayer.

It is of course possible that there is a desire on the part of the participants to please the mentor, which could create a bias in the reporting of positive experiences. This is relevant in the case of the participants who asked to be recruited even though they were not initially invited. Nonetheless, given the triangulation of the data shown in Table 20, it is not likely to account for all of the positive results. Furthermore, I am not in any official position of authority with the participants except that of a lay leader and unofficial mentor. This would make the need to please the mentor less of an issue, even though it does not completely remove the possibility of desirability bias.

The insights from the participants' journeys, as discussed above when comparing the most life-giving stage of their spiritual life as compared to the other stages, and as displayed in figure 1, resulted in a list of variables that were associated with the most life-giving phases of the participants' prayer lives prior to the study, but were less evident in the other phases. Of those however, only five were actionable, meaning they were under the control of the individual. By combining some that are similar, we can summarize them into the following three:

1. Reading (both the Bible and other Christian spiritual writing)

2. Community
3. Instruction (both in teaching and mentoring)

The mentoring approach then would do well to incorporate these three elements. Wise instruction can come from a mentor as well as a teacher or pastor. Mentoring provides instruction in a more personal and relational fashion. It was mentioned only twice in the pre-study interviews, and both were informal. This is most likely because formal mentoring was not readily available.

These three actionable factors appear to be enablers of a life-giving personal prayer life for these participants. Two out of these three were evident in this study. The reading aspect did not appear in the results of this study in a consistent fashion. The community aspect came up during the post-study interviews in answer to the feedback questions 2, 3, and 4 in Table 17. Community was something that almost everyone wanted more of. It is interesting to note that the community that seemed to impact people positively, and which was yearned for in the feedback, was specific to a community of people who are also practicing the same or similar personal spiritual practices. Two of the participants referred to that in their histories when they described personal devotional books that their whole church or youth group were reading as a community. The instruction aspect of mentoring definitely was a part of the program, and the participants commented often and positively on the various types of input received. The next topic to consider then is what input or instruction was most helpful.

The Transitions As Seen by Mentor and Participants

Tables 21 and 23 present the various types of input that was helpful to participants. The former shows the topics discussed from my point of view as the mentor, and the other is from the participants' point of view. We see that there is a correspondence between what was suggested and how it was beneficial to the participant as they expressed it later in the study. Two types of input were clearly seen from both the mentor's point of view as well as the participants'. These were related to distraction and to grace. There was one that was mentioned only by the mentor, that is the move towards relationship in prayer. There was also one that was mentioned only by the participants, which was the emphasis on paying attention to their desire to pray.

The first type of transition, was from distraction to greater focus. From the data we see that issues with distraction are experienced with some regularity. This is a situation where mentoring can, and has, made a difference. The need to transition from distraction to focus is a relevant transition that needs to take place for many in this stage.

The second type of transition involved grace, expressed in mentoring when the participants missed their goals. It is clear from the comments in the journal entries that they internalized this concept of grace. One participant noted in their journal for example, after realizing they were being legalistic: "realized that was totally legalistic and that's not what this is about." Another wrote, "I have also been learning to have more grace on myself." There was a total of ten

comments of that type. This shift then from guilt and shame to grace and freedom is the second transition that needed to happen.

One subtype of this movement in grace is that some people needed to be encouraged to rely on the grace from God to pray, instead of praying in their own strength. In Table 22, this was noted happening twice and was included in the initial training at the beginning of the program.

The third type of transition comes from the comments made by the participants about the focus in mentoring on desire. Instead of a conviction of the need for prayer resulting in a sense of obligation, prayer needs to be reframed as an invitation to communicate with God. This was done by helping participants get clear on what God was inviting them into personally in prayer. When done effectively, this allows people to get connected with their desire for God. The desire that God has put in their hearts to spend time with him is clarified with the help of the mentor, not by the mentor. The distinction here is critical because of the sense of ownership of the goals that develop.

The participants were instructed to look carefully at their desire for prayer, including duration and frequency, as indicators of God's personal invitation to them. A related theme came from the point of view of the mentor, namely a set of inputs given that helped to encourage more relationship with God in prayer instead of task orientation. The combination of these two sets of comments then sets up a transition from obligation and task to invitation and relationship. The need for this transition becomes even more evident when compared with the high

number of comments regarding self-discipline, performance, or obligation in the pre-study interviews (11 comments from 5 interviews).

The proposed model then, as shown in figure 8, brings together the findings from the narratives in the pre-study interviews, the weekly journal reflections that the participants provided, my own notes from the weekly mentoring sessions, as well as the post study interviews. Even though the supporting data is convincing, it is so in the context of this particular church setting, and with a mentor who brings the particular background that I do to the study.

Conclusion and Implications: What Was Learned?

This study clearly indicates that Christians in a context similar to this one would grow in prayer if mentoring by someone with a similar background is made available by the local church. In the *Reveal* study, personal spiritual practices, which include personal prayer, are consistently correlated with growth toward Christian maturity as has already been described. Although this study was too short to measure growth toward maturity, it did observe the positive impact of this type of prayer on participants' spiritual lives. A mentoring approach is ideal for addressing the varying needs of individuals around personal prayer. It is a good format for providing support in overcoming the challenges individuals face. These obstacles can keep people from making needed transitions in places where they are stuck. Mentoring in this context has been shown to help people make at least three types of critical forward movements. The first was a movement from task

and obligation, to relationship and invitation. The second was from guilt and shame to grace and freedom. The third was from distraction to greater focus.

In order for churches to provide such a ministry, it is critical to provide appropriate training so that the mentors are equipped to respond to the particular needs that were identified in this study. Analysis of the suggestions and feedback from the study identified the following helpful areas of training for mentors:

1. Understand how to address questions about distractions in prayer.
2. Apply grace to alleviate guilt and shame about perceived failures in prayer.
3. Gently steer participants toward reliance on God's strength and learn to suggest that participants can ask for God's grace to pray.
4. Be careful about the source of participants' motivations for prayer in order to steer them away from guilt and shame.
5. Be aware of and set aside their own conscious or subconscious goals for participants.
6. Make sure participants develop their own goals in prayer out of a sense of invitation, rather than imposing the mentor's experience of what the goals should be.
7. Recognize when participants are treating prayer like a task, and help them reframe their view of prayer as relationship.

Certainly, there are other types of ministries churches can provide to stimulate personal prayer. However, this mentoring approach provides a holistic program that encompasses all the variables this study has shown to be helpful. It provides instruction, community, accountability, as well as specific training to handle the most relevant obstacles. Church communities may or may not have someone with the same background in counseling and spiritual direction as I do, and that may well lead to different results. It seems from this study that this type

of background is helpful, so if churches have people with this kind of training, it can be leveraged for this type of ministry. At the same time, the mentoring exercised here was neither counseling nor spiritual direction. Therefore, it is likely that with some basic training, a level of fruitfulness can be expected regardless.

Another note of possible difference is the context. This work was done in a Vineyard church plant, with participants in one age group in a very urban setting. It is highly likely that differences in context may also produce different results.

The conclusions and implications are nonetheless of practical value to the church. They can be launching points for further studies. A logical next step in this field of study would be to assess where the individuals are with their personal prayer practices a year after the study, to measure how long the impact of the mentoring lasted. Another possible next step is to develop training materials based on the experiences, findings, and implications from this study. These materials could be used to train a sample of mentors who are passionate about personal prayer and who could provide mentoring in a similar context. Studying the impact of that mentoring can yield results which can be used to fine-tune the training. It is hoped that further refinements and iterations would continue to bless and enrich the lives of those seeking a fuller, deeper personal prayer life, leading them to a closer relationship with Jesus.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will strive to bring together the various elements of this portfolio. Those elements include the salient avenues of formation from my personal journey, how those influenced how I developed the Enhanced Spiritual Continuum, and from there the choice of mentoring in personal prayer as a means to formation in the study that I have performed and documented. The results of this study support the positive impact of mentoring on personal prayer, and confirm the connection between personal prayer and spiritual growth.

My journey of spiritual formation visits a number of diverse spiritual traditions with divergent theologies and spiritual practices. In this journey, I have come to believe that as divergent as the theologies can be, the person of Jesus is the same. I have found greater differences in emphases than in theology, and far greater commonality in the love of the faithful for our Lord Jesus. It is in this commonality and varying emphases that I have been most blessed and most enabled to be a bridge between the communities.

The influences were not equal, and they did not come at the same time, but rather in seasons. Using the Enhanced Spiritual Continuum developed in chapter three, I will now look at each stage, how the influences from the different

traditions affected how it was enhanced, and particularly what individuals at each stage may need in order to move to the next stage. Of particular interest in this study are the needs at each stage first for the type of mentoring and spiritual practices that are most helpful, and then the type of small groups, as well as how to deal with adversity.

My experience of the first stage, Exploring Christ, shown in Table 25, was essentially evangelical, at the student Christmas conference. It was there that I was able to ask questions, have reasonable discussions, and hear testimony of the work of God in people's lives.

It was a very condensed experience, and not as likely to be experienced similarly by a majority of people. This first stage of the model therefore is more influenced by my experiences with evangelization models such as Alpha, as described in both chapters two and three. In this Enhanced Spiritual Continuum then, some form of instruction is needed to share the basics of Christianity, as well as to provide input on the type of Bible to acquire, and to introduce basic forms of prayer like using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). During that stage the individual's relationship with God is most helped to move to the next level by learning to read Scripture and apply it to their daily life, as well as by learning to pray for guidance at least a few times a week. To help them do this, a dyadic relationship with a mentor or discipler can provide them with practical advice in these matters. These practicalities can also be taught in a small group setting, assuming the individual is comfortable with attending one.

Table 25. The first stage

Stage Name	Exploring Christ	
Spiritual Disciplines	Reading	Reading modern translations of the Bible (or paraphrases)
	Prayer	Simple formats like ACTS
Dyadic Relationships	Mentor Discipler Answering questions	
Small Groups	Exploratory	
Learning to Respond to Suffering	Accepting the reality of the tension between a loving God and a suffering world	
Transitions in the above	Prayer a few times a week Reflection on Scripture and its application to daily life.	

In the second phase, Growing in Christ shown in Table 26, the Willow Creek data shows a doubling in personal spiritual practices. There is an increase in personal practices from a few times a week to a daily practice. According to that research, this increase is correlated with helping individuals transition to the next stage. Growth in these daily practices requires input, which can be done in a small group or in a dyadic relationship. This would include things like learning how to do an inductive Bible study, how to use Bible study guides, how to journal, and how to deepen a personal relationship with God by sharing deeper feelings with him. The obstacles that begin to develop in this stage and the next are best dealt with in a mentoring relationship, which will be discussed further after the remaining stages are summarized.

This stage was also for me largely evangelical, with basic discipleship coming from evangelical student groups on campus. I had a very shortened experience of stage 1 at the student conference, so I needed to learn the spiritual

disciplines from that previous stage as well as those from this stage during this period. I was indeed blessed during the rest of my university years with disciplers, mentors, and prayer partners. I learned about the grace of expressing my feelings in prayer, including with the help of the Psalms and without, and eventually how to leverage the themes in the Lord's Prayer as a way to structure my conversation with God. I learned how to read the Bible and saw its significant impact on my spiritual life in ways I could not have expected. I also learned the importance of commitment to community. Recovering from the romantic breakups and approaching romantic relationships differently was part of the suffering in denial of self and overcoming sin that I needed to get through at this stage.

Table 26. The second stage

Stage Name	Growing in Christ	
Spiritual Disciplines	Reading	Inductive Bible Study Bible study guides
	Prayer	Psalms – expressing feelings Personal pattern of prayer from Lord's Prayer
Dyadic Relationships	Discipleship Mentoring Prayer partners	
Small Groups	Most active in this stage Cover foundational theology and the essentials of the Christian Biblical narrative	
Learning to Respond to Suffering	Suffering in denial of self and overcoming of sin	
Transitions in the above	Shift in prayer and reading from a few times a week to daily.	

The third stage, Close to Christ, is shown in Table 27 below. The data from *Move* shows that increased activity in personal spiritual practices assist the

person in transitioning to the next stage from there. A dyadic relationship in this stage can be helpful in suggesting additional reading, introducing listening prayer, and possibly teaching how to do personal retreats. As the mentor sees gaps that need to be addressed, they can suggest reading Christian spiritual material beyond the Bible as well. This dyadic relationship can take the form of counseling, spiritual direction or mentoring.

Table 27. The third stage

Stage Name	Close to Christ	
Spiritual Disciplines	Reading	Additional reading beyond Scripture Formation Bible reading (e.g., Lectio Divina)
	Prayer	Journaling Listening prayer Intro to personal prayer retreats
Dyadic Relationships	Counseling Spiritual Direction Mentoring	
Small Groups	Christian leadership training Identification of spiritual gifts Refining a sense of calling Establishing Kingdom stewardship in various aspects of life Rule of Life	
Learning to Respond to Suffering	Beginning to internalize a theology of suffering, including acceptance that suffering can come from the hand of God as he prunes us; beginning to accept and embrace the cross	
Transitions in the above	Increasing daily spiritual practices	

This Close to Christ stage has been where most of my post-college life has been, with some momentary, and unfortunately not yet lasting, steps into the last phase of Christ-Centered. This third stage began for me with Catholic mentors and saw my first exposure to the Vineyard movement, with its openness to the

charismatic gifts of the Spirit. This combination was surprisingly complementary. The priests I knew were familiar with the Catholic charismatic renewal and were not opposed to the reality and practice of charismatic gifts. In fact, it was their acceptance and affirmation of it, although neither of them were part of it, that helped me to be less apprehensive of it in the beginning.

The main concern expressed by the priests for me was the lack of experience of the sacraments at the Vineyard. At the time, sacraments were less weighty for me. What I sensed then was that the value of Scripture, community, and growing in the use of my gifts in lay ministry were more critical to my spiritual life. I have however come to value sacraments later in my life, but not quite in the same way as my mentors would have liked. My personal integration of the sacraments from both traditions is that they are part of life with God in a larger way than either tradition emphasizes. Henri Nouwen says: “Jean-Pierre de Caussade, in his three-hundred-year-old spiritual classic, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, assures us that God speaks to us through every moment of every day” (Nouwen et al. 2010, locations 655-656 of 2649).

Further along in this stage, the acceptance and embrace of our own suffering as a tool of formation, described in detail in chapter two, came to me from the Catholic tradition. This understanding that suffering is part and parcel of our journey with the crucified one and that it is only in joining in his suffering that we share in his resurrection is a theology that became clearest to me with a Catholic spiritual director in this stage. Learning how to embrace and not reject

the cross came for me most significantly in learning to deal with suffering and the eight lessons I learned, and continue to learn, as outlined in chapter two.

The last stage, Christ-Centered, is shown in Table 28. In this last stage, personal spiritual practices that focus more on formational reading, like *lectio divina*, and on prayers of meditation and contemplation, as well as the use of the Examen prayer on a regular basis, are helpful in deepening one's relationship with God on an ongoing basis. The role of a mentor in dyadic relationships is replaced by spiritual direction and long-term spiritual friendships, which can provide a setting for accountability around personal practices and long-term goals.

It is in this stage that hopefully the eight lessons about suffering that I started to learn in the previous stage begin to bear fruit and make it possible to want only God's will, unencumbered by the pursuit of comfort and personal wants.

Table 28. The fourth stage

Stage Name	Christ Centered	
Spiritual Disciplines	Reading	Continued formational Bible reading (e.g. Lectio Divina)
	Prayer	Examen Meditation and Contemplation
Dyadic Relationships	Spiritual Friendship Accountability Spiritual Direction	
Learning to Respond to Suffering	Accepting and embracing the cross, caring only for God's will	
Small Groups	Peer groups Group Spiritual Direction	

In addition, I have felt an invitation to contemplation and meditation that seems to fit in this stage. I have been trying to respond as described in chapter

three, but without feeling like I am necessarily able to stay in this stage for very long. It seems I slip back to stage 3 more often than not. My teachers in this space have been largely Catholic authors, although they have been mediated by my studies in spiritual direction at North Park Theological Seminary, which is the denominational seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

In addition to these encouraging contributions, there were a few areas of tension that I was not able to fully resolve. The question of the intercession of saints and Mary is intriguing because James 5:16 clearly states that prayers of the righteous are powerful, and so asking someone who is known to be righteous to intercede for me makes sense. Yet there is nothing that implies that we can ask for the intercession of saints who have died in the Scripture.

The issue of the Eucharist remains a mystery to me. It is conceivable that we can participate in Christ's death and resurrection through it because God is out of the time-experience as we perceive it. I experience the presence of God in the Eucharist in more than just the Catholic church. The bottom line for me in this case is that it is more significant for me to practice the sacrament than to understand it fully.

The question of absolution from sin being mediated through a priest was the most difficult to navigate for me. I believe in the value of confession of sins to each other (James 5:16), but confessing sins directly to God and receiving his forgiveness directly is not a problem for me. One thing I have observed, however, is that confession to others helps to break the power of sin; as James 5:16 says, it brings healing, in a way that is more tangible than confessing straight to God.

Aside from these areas that I could not reconcile, I was blessed by each of the traditions in many ways. From the Catholic tradition, I enjoyed the benefits of spiritual direction and mentoring of some very wise priests. I also learned to value the importance of passing on lessons of faith on a personal level, the spiritual power of sacraments, and how to embrace God's redemption of suffering. The charismatic strain strengthened my faith by giving me a lens with which to see the supernatural activity of God in the Scriptures continuing in modern times. The evangelical tradition taught me to value the life-giving power of Scripture, evangelism, and community. Each of these traditions also taught me different things about prayer. In a nutshell, the evangelicals taught me how to pray conversationally, the Catholics meditatively, and the charismatics joyfully and intimately.

This is not to say that each of these areas of growth were only there for me to experience in one tradition compared to the others. All of these values are present in all of these traditions, and I learned each of these things to some degree from each of the traditions. However, given the prevalence of certain practices in some traditions compared to others, as well as how, when, and where I came into contact with each of them, those are the things that influenced me to a larger degree from one tradition than another. In the end, the person of Jesus the Christ is what transcends for me all the conflicting theologies and the differing emphases. Jesus said that he is the truth, and wherever I have found people who were committed to following him, I learned from him in them, and hopefully they learned some things from him in me as well.

Regardless of which tradition I learned something from, there were four avenues of formation that seemed to be consistent throughout my journey. These avenues, described in some detail in chapter two as well as earlier in this conclusion, include formational times of difficulty, the power of dyadic relationships, the energy of personal prayer and reading, and to a lesser extent, small groups.

Two of these, dyadic relationships – mentoring more specifically – and personal prayer, were the focus of the project in chapter four. The frequency and type of personal spiritual practice change from one stage to the next, and mentoring was intended to help the individual facing these changes. The results of the project in chapter four identified a common set of obstacles faced by individuals in the middle two stages. Overcoming the obstacles was supported by a combination of instruction, community, and especially mentoring. The importance of a trained mentor in a dyadic setting becomes critical because these stages and obstacles, though common, are by no means uniform. Room for individual variations must be accounted for. The changes in prayer and reading practices do not happen automatically. These obstacles need to be addressed when and where encountered by each individual so that they do not stall. If the individual waits for the right input to happen in a small group setting for instance, it may take quite a long time, and this increases the risk of treading water rather than moving forward during that period.

The types of obstacles observed fell into four categories. One overarching category was that of circumstances that are challenging to prayer (not to be

confused with the category of perceived high need, which refers to overall difficulty, suffering, and adversity). The lives of the participants echoed those of the general population in the modern world, experiencing continuous changes. From moving to getting married, to having children, to changing jobs and changing churches, all of these changes and many others created challenges to a consistent and fruitful prayer life. The most helpful aspect to dealing with these types of challenges was the consistency of the mentoring relationship. This was uniformly attested to and appreciated in the post-study interviews.

The other types of obstacles were more individual in scope. Many were struggling with distraction during prayer, and needed suggestions on how to deal with those. Others in these two stages were experiencing guilt and shame over their failures in spiritual disciplines. These negative emotions built on each other, and that made them all the more difficult to overcome.

Mentoring helped to catalyze a transition, allowing them to overcome these obstacles, by clearly labelling guilt and shame as not from God and helping the individuals to find a joy in grace and freedom around prayer. The positive experiences would then build on each other. This joy would then increase their desire to pray.

The guilt and shame are also related to a sense of task and obligation around prayer. Seeing prayer as something to do rather than a relationship of joy is demotivating. Changing that view was done by helping the individuals to focus on a sense of invitation. When the individual's goals were discerned as a personal invitation to a relational time with God, their sense of task and obligation would

change. This also increased their sense of ownership of their goals in personal prayer and reading.

One-on-one mentoring allowed for a focused discussion around the needs of each individual. This could have been done in a small group setting, but it would have been more challenging. The group would need to be intentional around this topic and allow for the individuals to share their struggles. Although this would be quite beneficial, as experienced in Wesley's small groups, the level of vulnerability and transparency required by Wesley's small groups does not translate well in a modern church context. The types of questions asked in those groups (see chapter three) would be considered too intrusive. The mentoring relationship, where the individual feels a level of safety to be able to share their struggles without fear of judgment, opens the door to dealing with the issues in a personalized, efficient, and hopefully productive manner.

The need for community is not to be minimized however, especially in the middle two stages. In this study, a group meeting was held before the period of mentoring in prayer. This was very much appreciated, and one consistent piece of feedback was a request to have a similar meeting at the end of the period of mentoring. This reinforced a finding from the pre-study interviews: some of the participants had commented that periods when the community they were in had engaged in common spiritual practices were especially helpful to them. These findings align well with the Spiritual Continuum, where participation in community activities is very prevalent in the second stage of the model (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 53), but as people grow, they move "from more casual

friendships to mentor relationships, relationships that typically involve greater accountability and intimacy” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 120).

The data in chapter four not only showed the effectiveness of mentoring in helping the individuals to overcome these obstacles, it also showed a positive impact on their relationship with God. The spiritual growth experienced, most frequently described as inner peace, insights gained, and greater resilience in the face of life’s difficulties, was consistent across all individuals in the study.

Although this study was not long enough or large enough to ascertain any transitions from one stage to the next in the Spiritual Continuum, the spiritual fruit describes movement in the right direction towards growth in spiritual maturity.

The implications of this study are that if churches and para-church organizations want to encourage the spiritual growth of their members, the role of personal spiritual practices and the importance of dyadic relationships in promoting them cannot be ignored. The recommendation here is for churches and ministries to establish and promote discipleship and mentoring programs, as well as provide referral resources for spiritual direction and counseling. This applies at the pastoral level as well, where the expectation can be set by governing bodies that pastors not having a spiritual director should be the exception rather than the norm.

There were two limitations to the study in chapter four that are of note. First, the question of desirability bias (where the participants skew their reporting in a positive direction out of a desire to please the researcher) cannot be ignored. It was likely part of the phenomena that were observed and the comments that

were made. Second, the question of how much these results were related to my particular combination of experience and training is important. Would the results differ with someone who is not trained in spiritual direction or in counseling? This brings us to the next steps in developing this type of ministry: mentors need to be trained. Developing the right kind of training is essential. This is discussed in detail in the concluding section of the project report. It bears repeating here and is worthy of further study.

It is recommended then that a next step in this research would be the development of a training curriculum for mentors in personal spiritual practices. This training would include all the elements discussed in the conclusion of the project report. As this training is delivered and programs of mentoring are completed, a second stage of research can be initiated to gather further data to measure its effectiveness and address any other challenges that are discovered. Other variations could be tried as well in different contexts. A group that is homogenous for example, and that has some experience with solitude, could benefit from a retreat at the beginning or the end, or possibly both. These retreats could include some communal sharing times as well as periods of solitude. Finally, a third stage would look at implementing support mechanisms for those who are called to this type of ministry, and possibly even further training. I hope that what I have learned through this program can be further put to use to refine these offerings through continued iterations of this type of program.

This portfolio has documented my spiritual journey and developed a model of formation that focuses on what is most helpful in transitioning

individuals from one stage to the next of their spiritual growth. Two elements of this model, mentoring and personal prayer, were studied more directly in a project where I mentored seven individuals at a Vineyard church plant for seven weeks. The results showed a positive link between mentoring and forward movement in personal prayer, as well as a positive relationship between that growth in prayer and greater fruitfulness in the participants' spiritual lives. The implication of these results for churches and para-church organizations that want to encourage the growth of their members is to provide resources for dyadic relationships that can encourage growth in personal spiritual practices. In the end, God's purpose for us is to transform us into the image of his son (Romans 8:28-29), and it is our imperative to press into the means he provides for us to do so.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Recruitment Email

Dear Brown Line Vineyard Leader,

I am reaching out to you to invite you to participate in a research project for my Doctor of Ministry program. Following are the details:

- the project will run for seven weeks
- during the seven weeks, I will meet with each participant over the phone or over coffee for 15 to 30 minutes once each week to talk about their personal prayer life
- each participant will receive a survey email each week with a prompt to journal for one paragraph
- each participant will be interviewed for approximately one hour once before the seven weeks and once after
- all participants will attend a two to three hour introductory group session
- each participant will need to review and sign the attached consent form and return it to me sometime in the coming week

Space is limited, and acceptance is on a first come basis. Please prayerfully consider participating in this with me.

Blessings,

Nader Sahyouni

Appendix 2: Consent Form

I understand that this program is part of a research study for a Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto, Canada. The research is titled “The Impact of One to One Mentoring in Personal prayer on Spiritual Growth of Individuals at the Brown Line Vineyard”. The study has been approved by the Tyndale Research Ethics Board. It will run during the months of September through November of 2016 and I understand that I am being invited to participate in the study during that period. The principal investigator is X. Nader Sahyouni, who can be reached at or at

The purpose of this work is to develop a greater understanding of mentoring in personal prayer, and to use that information in developing or improving mentoring programs for prayer that can be used by interested parties at other churches. I understand that my personal prayer life and my relationship with God may benefit from this research.

The length of this program is seven weeks. I understand that I am committing to participate in the following:

1. Two audio recorded interviews, approximately one hour each, one before the seven week program begins, and one at the end of the program.
2. Introductory two to three hour seminar on prayer where a model for developing personal prayer habits will be presented.
3. Weekly fifteen to thirty minute telephone or in-person individual prayer mentoring meeting with Nader Sahyouni, where aspects of my personal prayer experiences and spiritual life will be discussed.
4. Respond to a weekly email, which will ask me to journal online for one paragraph about your experience in prayer for the week.
5. A minimum of five uninterrupted minutes of personal prayer daily, five times a week, where I do not participate in other concurrent activities.

I understand that the information gleaned from this program will be published in a Doctoral Project Portfolio that will be available to online research databases. The resulting analysis may also be presented at conferences and distributed in publications to further develop this area of knowledge for the church.

I understand that there are no known risks in participating in this project. However, I understand that my participation in this research is completely voluntary and I may withdraw from this process at any time for any reason without consequence by notifying X. Nader Sahyouni, the principal investigator in this research.

I understand that my name will not be used in any public presentation of this research. All information given, conversations recorded and comments made will only be communicated publicly as aggregate data. No individuals will be identified unless specific permission to do so is given. I understand that the primary investigator cannot guarantee that other participants in the initial seminar will keep what I say confidential.

I understand that providing permission to the primary investigator to analyze and report on these data does not waive any legal rights.

I understand that all documents or files related to this research will be stored in a locked cabinet or a password protected computer.

Please direct any questions related to this project to X. Nader Sahyouni, D.Min. (Cand.) (), or Pastors Kyle Hanawalt at () or Vince Brackett at ().

I understand that I may contact Nader Sahyouni or the ethics board at reb@tyndale.ca if I have further questions about participant rights. I understand that Nader Sahyouni is a licensed counselor, and therefore is a mandatory reporter of child or elderly abuse, and if information to that effect is shared, confidentiality cannot be assured.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement

I, _____, will provide transcription services for the project titled “The Impact of One to One Mentoring in Personal Prayer On Spiritual Growth of Individuals at the Brown Line Vineyard” run by Tyndale Seminary Doctor of Ministry student X. Nader Sahyouni.

I agree to keep confidential all information on all audio recordings that X. Nader Sahyouni shares with me. I agree to keep the identity of any individual identified explicitly, implicitly, or accidentally, on these recordings confidential.

I agree that I will keep these recordings, and the transcriptions I produce from them, in a password protected environment to which I alone hold the password, and that the computer on which they are stored is appropriately protected from malware, and is in a physically secured space. I agree to not make copies and not allow anyone else access to them or the contents that I transcribe. I agree that upon completion I will destroy all recordings and associated transcription or other associated files as well as any backups.

I understand that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this agreement, and for any harm to the individuals if I share information from the recordings that affects them.

Transcriber's name (printed)

Transcriber's signature

Date _____

Appendix 4: Supplemental Tables

Table 29. Difference in average count of frequency codes between phases identified as most life-giving and other phases

Code	Avg count in most life-giving phases (8 phases)	Avg count in other phases (26 phases)	Difference
High frequency (>5 days a week)	0.38	0.35	0.03
Medium frequency (4 to 5 days a week)	0.75	0.08	0.67
Low frequency (<4 days a week)	0.38	0.38	-0.01
Ongoing prayer (no time set aside for prayer)	0.00	0.19	-0.19

Table 30. Difference in average count of duration codes between phases identified as most life-giving and other phases

Code	Avg count in most life-giving phases (8 phases)	Avg count in other phases (26 phases)	Difference
High duration (>25 minutes)	0.63	0.19	0.43
Medium duration (15 to 25 minutes)	0.63	0.19	0.43
Low duration (<15 minutes)	0.25	0.15	0.10

Table 31. Full list of differences in average count of codes between phases identified as most life-giving and other phases

Category	Average count in most life- giving phases (8 phases)	Average count in other phases (26 phases)	Difference
Positive Prayer Experience	5.63	0.62	5.01
Positive Impact/Consequence of Prayer	3.75	0.15	3.60
Positive Experience Uattributed	1.25	0.23	1.02

Category	Average count in most life-giving phases (8 phases)	Average count in other phases (26 phases)	Difference
Times of High Need	1.38	0.23	1.14
Christian spiritual reading other than Bible	1.13	0.19	0.93
Positive Community	1.13	0.27	0.86
Instruction	0.75	0.23	0.52
Bible Reading	1.00	0.54	0.46
Positive Desire	0.50	0.08	0.42
Positive Mentoring Experience	0.13	0.04	0.09
Neutral Prayer Experience	0.00	0.08	-0.08
Positive Expectation	0.13	0.08	0.05
Challenge	0.13	0.15	-0.03
Repeating Negative Cycle	0.00	0.08	-0.08
Negative or No Instruction in Prayer	0.00	0.12	-0.12
No Community	0.00	0.19	-0.19
Negative Prayer Experience	0.88	0.92	-0.05
Negative Experience Unattributed	0.00	0.38	-0.38

Table 32. Count of categories with codes in a given week from the journal entries

Category	Pos/Neg	Week Number							Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bible reading	NA	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Challenge to prayer	Negative	0	3	4	3	7	4	5	26
Reported duration of prayer	NA	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3
Logistical comments	NA	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	5
Negative impact/consequences of prayer	Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Negative experience	Negative	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	4

Category	Pos/Neg	Week Number							Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
unattributed									
Negative prayer experience	Negative	1	8	5	5	6	4	3	32
Neutral prayer experience	NA	2	1	1	1	0	0	3	8
Positive impact/consequence of prayer	Positive	14	5	14	3	6	16	8	66
Positive desire	Positive	4	5	2	2	0	1	4	18
Positive experience unattributed	Positive	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	4
Positive expectation	Positive	0	3	3	2	0	1	2	11
Positive mentoring experience	Positive	4	2	9	1	2	1	0	19
Positive prayer experience	Positive	11	10	14	11	9	10	11	76
Prayer type	NA	6	7	3	8	8	0	3	35
Reading	NA	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 33. Count of codes in positive prayer experiences

Codes	Counts
Unspecified positive prayer experience	20
Feeling connected in prayer	11
Hearing God	6
Increased focus in prayer	5
Fruitful	4
Sharing feelings with God	4
Being consistent in prayer	3
Feeling encouraged in prayer	2
Peace in prayer	2
Authentic	1
Sense of being loved by God	1
Sensing God's comfort	1
Enjoy reading	1
Fulfilling	1
Grace In prayer	1
Helped prayer	1

Codes	Counts
Increased intentionality in prayer	1
Intimacy In prayer	1
Led by Holy Spirit	1
Reduce shame/guilt	1
Refuge	1
Rewarding	1
Rich	1
Structure	1
Prayer of surrender	1
Sweet experience in prayer	1
Trying new things	1

Table 34. Count of codes in negative prayer experiences

Codes	Counts
Distraction in and from prayer	9
Inconsistent prayer times	7
Feelings of futility	3
Experiencing doubt	2
Mood affecting prayer	2
Unspecified negative prayer experience	2
Annoying prayer experience	1
Prayer driven by anxiety	1
Avoidance of prayer	1
Feelings of guilt/shame	1
Frustration	1
Not hearing God	1
Not praying	1

Table 35. Count of codes in positive impact/consequence of prayer category

Codes	Counts
Sense of peace	17
Gained Insight	9
Sense of hope	5
Demonstrated more resilience in life due to prayer	5
Life-giving	4
Having a positive ministry impact	4
Gratitude in life	3
Less anxiety	3
Answered prayer	2

Codes	Counts
Sense of connection	2
Sense of faith	2
Awareness of blessing	1
Feeling grounded	1
Experienced healing	1
Legalism insight	1
Experiencing less stress	1
Positive impact unspecified	1
Positivity	1
Prayerful rest of day	1
Resulting community	1
Experienced growth	1

Table 36. Count of codes in negative impact/consequence of prayer category

Codes	Counts
No impact from prayer	1

Table 37. Positive comments expressing positive desire, positive expectation and positive mentoring experiences

Category	Codes	Counts
Positive desire	Desire more of God	11
	Discernment	6
	Seeking God's presence	1
Positive expectation	Hopeful expectation	8
	Excited to pray	3
Positive mentoring experience	Experienced grace during the study	8
	Mentoring re distraction	3
	Mentoring towards desire	2
	Helpful suggestion from mentor	1

Table 38. Negative comments expressing challenges faced in setting aside time to pray

Category	Codes	Counts
Challenges	Challenging circumstances	20
	Busyness	3

Category	Codes	Counts
	Unspecified challenge	2
	Fatigue	1

Table 39. Categories and their codes in answer to the question about prayer life of participant during the week before (pre) the study, and one week after it ended (post)

Category	Code	Count	
		Last Week Pre	Last Week Post
Challenges	Challenging circumstances	0	4
	Fatigue	1	0
Repeating negative cycle	Catch 22	2	0
	Negative thought pattern	1	0
Prayer from performance, obligation, pressure, or discipline	Prayer motivated by performance, obligation, or self-discipline alone	3	0
Reported duration of prayer	High duration (>25 minutes)	1	1
	Medium duration (15 to 25 minutes)	3	3
	Low duration (<15 minutes)	2	3
Frequency	High frequency (>5 days a week)	2	1
	Medium frequency (4 to 5 days a week)	2	1
	Low frequency (<4 days a week)	1	5
	Ongoing prayer (no time set aside for prayer)	2	0
Times of high need	Expressions of great need for God and his help	2	0
Logistical comments	Praying during commute times	2	0
	Expression of high value of prayer in the morning	1	0
Negative impact/consequences of prayer	Having less faith than before	1	0
	Negative expectations	1	0

Category	Code	Count	
		Last Week Pre	Last Week Post
	Negative impact on ministry	1	0
	No peace	1	0
	Not enough impact from prayer on life	1	1
	Disconnected from God, self, and or others	0	0
Negative experiences unattributed	Anxiety	1	0
	Emotional triggers	1	0
	Sin	1	0
	Feeling uneasy	1	0
Negative or no instruction in prayer	Unhelpful instruction	2	0
	Teaching of overly emotional approach to prayer	1	0
Negative prayer experiences	Prayer driven by anxiety	3	0
	Avoidance of prayer	1	0
	Disappointment in prayer	1	0
	Distraction in and from prayer	2	0
	Experiencing doubt	4	0
	Experiencing dryness in prayer	2	0
	Feeling impatient with God	1	0
	Inconsistent prayer times	3	1
	Low discipline	1	0
	Need to control	1	0
	Not feeling prayer is authentic	0	0
	Not feeling connected in prayer	2	0
	Not hearing God	2	0
	Prayer is not life-giving	4	0
	Prayer motivated by performance, obligation, or self-discipline alone	0	0

Category	Code	Count	
		Last Week Pre	Last Week Post
	Rushed prayer	1	0
	Negative prayer experiences from woundedness	4	0
Neutral prayer experience	Inconsistent prayer times	0	0
	Prayer that only maintains relationship with God, without growth	2	0
	Ordinary experience	0	2
	Focused on self	1	0
Positive impact/consequence	Closer to God due to prayer	0	1
	Sense of faith	0	1
	Sensing God is at work	0	1
	Sensing God's presence in one's life	0	2
	Sensing more grace in life	1	0
	Feeling grounded	1	1
	Gained insight	0	1
	Experiencing joy	0	1
	Less anxiety	2	1
	Feeling life from prayer	2	1
	Having a positive impact on ministry to others	0	3
	Having more energy	0	1
	Feeling more love	0	2
	Sense of peace	2	1
	Demonstrated more resilience in life due to prayer	0	1
	Becoming more self aware	0	1
Positive desire	Desire more of God	9	4
	Desire for discernment	5	2
Positive expectation	Excited to pray	1	0
Positive prayer experience	Sense of assurance	0	1
	Sense of being loved by God	1	0
	Close to God in prayer	0	3
	Sensing God's comfort	0	3
	Feeling connected to God	1	0

Category	Code	Count	
		Last Week Pre	Last Week Post
	in prayer		
	Being consistent in prayer	0	1
	Positive experience of Immanuel prayer	1	0
	Feeling encouraged in prayer	0	0
	Increased focus in prayer	2	0
	Being aware of God listening, his presence, in prayer	0	0
	Being intentional in prayer as a positive experience	0	1
	Experiencing less stress	0	0
	Prayer feels natural	0	1
	Prayer feels necessary now	0	1
	Sense of peace in prayer	1	1
	Positive prayer experience unspecified	0	0
	Sense of refuge in prayer	0	1
	Sense of relief in prayer	0	1
	Sense of safety in prayer	0	1
	Satisfying prayer	0	2
	Sharing feelings with God	1	2
	Feeling heart softening during prayer	0	1
	Prayer of surrender	3	0
	Unspecified positive prayer experience	0	3
Prayer type	Conversational prayer	0	1
	Immanuel prayer	2	0
	Prayer of gratitude	0	1
	Intercessory prayer	3	0
	Journaling prayer	2	1
	Listening prayer	1	0
	Praying with music	1	0
	Prayer of petition	3	0
	Worship prayer	2	1
Reading	Christian spiritual reading other than Bible	2	0

Table 40. Total codes from the categories mentioned in answer to the question regarding participant's prayer life in the last week before (pre) the study and the last week after (post)

Category	Pre	Post
Challenges	1	4
Repeating negative cycle	3	0
Prayer from performance, obligation, pressure, or discipline	3	0
Reported duration of prayer	6	7
Frequency	7	7
Times of high need	2	0
Logistical comments	3	0
Negative impact/consequences of prayer	5	1
Negative experiences unattributed	4	0
Negative or no instruction in prayer	3	0
Negative prayer experiences	32	1
Neutral prayer experience	3	2
Positive impact/consequence	8	19
Positive desire	14	6
Positive expectation	1	0
Positive prayer experience	10	23
Prayer type	14	4
Reading	2	0

Table 41. Frequency comments in answer to question about last week's experience in prayer before (pre) and after (post) the study

Code	Count Pre	Count Post	Difference
High frequency (>5 days a week)	2	1	-1
Medium frequency (4 to 5 days a week)	1	5	4
Low frequency (<4 days a week)	2	1	-1
Ongoing prayer (no time set aside for prayer)	2	0	-2

Table 42. Duration comments in answer to question about last week's experience in prayer before (pre) and after (post) the study

Code	Count Pre	Count Post	Difference
High duration (>25 minutes)	1	1	0
Medium duration (15 to 25 minutes)	3	3	0
Low duration (<15 minutes)	2	3	1

Table 43. Total codes from the categories describing the last 7 weeks from the interviews after the study

Categories	Codes	Count
Should future focus on prayer only?	Prayer only	3
	Prayer focus plus other topics as needed	5
Suggestions for improvement?	Add a meeting at the end for everyone	3
	Vary the questions week to week	4
	More opportunity to share with everyone	1
Feedback on journaling reflection	Negative experience of journaling reflection	1
	Felt journaling reflection was redundant	1
	Did not like journaling online	1
	Journaling helped to connect with self	1
	Journaling helped reflect	2
	Journaling was reinforcing	2
	Journaling provided helpful structure	1
	Positive experience of journaling reflection	1
What was most helpful?	Accountability	4
	Sense of community	1
	Consistency	4
	You can choose something doable	1
	Instruction	2
	Sense of ownership	1
	Mentor's reframing	1
	Structure	2
Negative	Negative impact on ministry	1

Categories	Codes	Count
impact/consequences of prayer		
	Not enough impact from prayer on life	1
Negative prayer experience	Feelings of guilt/shame	1
	Unrealistic expectations	1
	Negative prayer experiences from past woundedness	1
What will help make this stick?	Learned how to deal with distraction	1
	Learned how to keep it doable	1
	Experienced the benefits	2
	Motivated by grace	1
	Instruction	2
	Mentoring	1
	Learned multiple methods	1
Phone logistics	Duration is appropriate	2
	Frequency is appropriate	5
Positive impact/consequences	Break negative cycle	1
	Closer to God due to prayer	1
	Sense of connection	1
	Prayer now feels essential	1
	Sense of faith	1
	Gratitude in life	2
	Feeling grounded	1
	Experienced growth	3
	Experienced healing	1
	Sense of hope	1
	Improved prayer	1
	Improved relationships	1
	Gained insight	1
	Developed intentionality in life	1
	Experiencing joy	1
	Less anxiety	1
	Less doubt	1
	More focus	2
	Sense of peace	3
	Sense of provision	1
	Demonstrated more resilience in life due to prayer	4

Categories	Codes	Count
	Increased self-awareness	1
	Desire more of God	2
	Desire for discernment	1
	Program met participant's need	1
Positive Mentoring Experiences	Experienced grace during the study	2
	Mentoring towards desire	2
	Mentoring towards grace	1
	Mentoring away from guilt/shame/pressure	1
	Appreciated open ended questions	1
	Appreciated suggestions	1
Positive Prayer Experiences	Closer to God in prayer	1
	Being consistent in prayer	6
	Depth	1
	Increased focus in prayer	1
	Experienced growth	0
	Helped prayer life	1
	Increased intentionality in prayer	1
	Peace in prayer	1
	Praying more	1
	Sharing feelings with God	3
	Taking small steps	1
	Unspecified positive prayer experience	3
Prayer Type	Journaling prayer	1

Table 44. Types of prayer reported

Codes	Counts
Journaling prayer	23
Prayer of petition	18
Conversational prayer	13
Worship prayer	13
Prayer of Gratitude	10
Intercessory prayer	10
Immanuel prayer	6
Listening prayer	6
Praying with music	6

Codes	Counts
Praying Scripture	2
Prayer unspecified	2
Prayer of visualization	2
Prayer through art	1
Meditative prayer	1
Prayer walk	1
Prayer of silence	5
Prayer to surrender feelings	1
Union prayer	1

Table 45. How codes were categorized

Category	Code
Bible reading	Reading the Bible as having magical powers
	Bible reflection
	Bible reading unspecified
	Formation Bible reading
	Reading random Bible passages
	Structured Bible reading
Challenge	Busyness
	Challenging circumstances
	Fatigue
	Unspecified challenge
Christian spiritual reading other than Bible	Reading Christian material
	Formation reading
	Random reading
Duration	High duration (>25 minutes)
	Low duration (<15 minutes)
	Medium duration (15 to 25 minutes)
Feedback on journaling reflection	Negative experience of journaling reflection
	Felt journaling reflection was redundant
	Did not like journaling online
	Journaling helped to connect with self
	Journaling helped reflect
	Journaling was reinforcing
	Journaling provided helpful structure

Category	Code
	Positive experience of journaling reflection
Frequency	High frequency (>5 days a week)
	Medium frequency (4 to 5 days a week)
	Low frequency (<4 days a week)
	Ongoing prayer (no time set aside for prayer)
High need	Great perceived need for God and His help
Instruction	Course
	Discipleship
	Talk
	Truth
Logistics	Praying during commute time
	Inconsistent time of day
	Expression of high value of prayer in the morning
	Made logistical change to allow for prayer
	Praying while running
Negative Experience	
Unattributed	Anxiety
	Disconnected from God, self, and or others
	Emotional triggers
	Inner negative state
	Less exciting
	Negative experience unspecified
	Sin
	Feeling uneasy
Negative impact/consequences of prayer	
	Having less faith than before
	Negative expectations
	Negative impact on ministry
Negative impact/consequences of prayer, cont.	
	No impact
	No peace
	Not enough impact from prayer on life
Negative or No Instruction	Unhelpful instruction
	No instruction
	Teaching of overly emotional approach to prayer
Negative Prayer Experience	Annoying prayer experience

Category	Code
	Prayer driven by anxiety
	Avoidance of prayer
	Destructive experience
	Disappointment in prayer
	Distraction from prayer and in prayer
	Experiencing doubt
	Experiencing dryness in prayer
	Fear
	Frustration
	Futility
	Guilt/shame
	High routine - rigidity
	Feeling impatient with God
	Inconsistent
	Low discipline
	Mood
	Need to control
	Negative answers
	Negative prayer experience unspecified
	No answer
	No prayer
	Not feeling connected in prayer
	Not hearing God
	Prayer is not life-giving
	Rushed prayer
	Shallow
	Unrealistic expectations
	Negative prayer experiences from woundedness
Neutral prayer experience	Impersonal
	Prayer that only maintains relationship with God, without growth
	Mixed prayer experience
Neutral prayer experience, cont.	Ordinary experience
	Attempt to recreate feeling
	Focused on self
No Community	No community
Phone logistics	Duration is appropriate

Category	Code
	Frequency is appropriate
Positive consequence of prayer	Answered prayer
	Awareness of blessing
	Becoming more Christ like
	Break negative cycle
	Close to God in general
	Feeling closer to God due to prayer
	Sense of connection
	Prayer now feels essential
	Faith
	Getting to know Christ
	Sensing God is at work
	Sensing God's presence in one's life
	Sensing more grace in life
	Conscious of gratitude
	Feeling more grounded
	Experienced growth
	Growth in prayer
	Experienced healing
	Honest
	Sense of hope
	Improved prayer
	Improved relationships
	Gaining insight
	Developed intentionality in life
	Experiencing joy
	Legalism insight
	Having less anxiety
	Less doubt
	Experiencing less stress
	Feeling life from prayer
	Having a positive impact on ministry to others
	Having more energy
	More focus
Positive consequence of prayer, cont.	Feeling more love
	Experiencing peace

Category	Code
	Positive impact
	Positive impact unspecified
	Positivity
	Prayerful
	Sense of provision
	Reduced anxiety
	Demonstrated more resilience in life due to prayer
	Resulting community
	Becoming more self-aware
	Trust
	Vulnerable
	Willing to take risk
Positive desire	Desire more
	Discernment
	Seeking God's presence
	Want to read
Positive expectation	Excited to pray
	Hopeful expectation
Positive experience unattributed	Fearless
	God as sovereign
	God's faithfulness
	Positive choice
	Positive feelings
	Positive unspecified
	Refreshing
	Reliable
	Self-care
	Stability
	Turning point
	Program met participant's need
Positive mentoring experience	Mentoring re distraction
	Grace during the study
	Mentoring to desire
	Mentoring towards grace
	Mentoring away from guilt/shame/pressure

Category	Code
	Appreciated open ended questions
	Positive suggestion from mentor
Positive prayer experience	Sense of assurance
	Authentic
	Sense of being loved by God
	Closer to God due to prayer
	Sensing God's comfort
	Feeling connected to God in prayer
	Consistency
	Depth
	Positive experience of Immanuel prayer
	Encouraged
	Enjoy reading
	Increased focus in prayer
	Fruitful
	Fulfilling
	Grace in prayer
	Hearing God
	Helped prayer life
	Helpful
	ID feelings
	Imaginative
	Being intentional in prayer as a positive experience
	Intimacy in prayer
	Led by Holy Spirit
	Prayer feels natural
	Prayer feels necessary now
	No guilt/perf/pressure
	Passion
	Sense of peace in prayer
	Personal
	Positive journal
	Praying more
	Reduce shame/guilt
	Reflective
	Sense of refuge in prayer
	Sense of relief in prayer

Category	Code
	Rewarding
	Rich
	Sense of safety in prayer
	Satisfying prayer
Positive prayer experience, cont.	Sense of God's presence in prayer
	Sharing feelings with God in prayer
	Taking small steps
	Feeling heart softening during prayer
	Structure
	Prayer of surrender
	Sweet experience in prayer
	Trying new things
	Union
	Unspecified positive prayer experience
Prayer	Prayer through art
	Praying Scripture
	Conversational prayer
	Immanuel prayer
	Prayer of gratitude
	Intercessory prayer
	Journal
	Listening prayer
	Meditative prayer
	Praying with music
	Prayer of petition
	Prayer unspecified
	Prayer walk
	Prayer of silence
	Silence
	Prayer to surrender feelings
	Union prayer
	Prayer of visualization
	Worship prayer
Prayer from performance, obligation, pressure, or discipline	Motivated by performance, obligation, or self-discipline alone
Should future focus on	Prayer only

Category	Code
prayer only?	
	Prayer focus plus other topics as needed
Stuck in Cycle	Catch 22
	Negative thought pattern
	Sin cycle
Suggestions for improvement?	Add a meeting at the end for everyone to come together
	Vary the questions week to week
	More opportunity to share with everyone
What was most helpful?	Accountability
What was most helpful cont.	Sense of community
	You can choose something doable
	Instruction
	Sense of ownership
	Mentor's reframing
	Structure
What will help make this stick?	Learned how to deal with distraction
	Learned how to keep it doable
	Experienced the benefits
	Motivated by grace
	Instruction
	Mentoring
	Learned multiple methods
Positive Community	Church
	College group
	Community unspecified
	Family
	Good community
	School community
	Small group
	Youth group

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